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CONTENTS

Page

'SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT', by *John Speirs* 274

JAMES'S DEBT TO HAWTHORNE (II): 'THE MARBLE FAUN' and 'THE WINGS OF THE DOVE', by *Marius Bewley* 301

ON THE TRAGEDY OF ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, by *L. C. Knights* 318

CORRESPONDENCE: *G. Wilson Knight* and *John F. Danby* 323

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS:

L. H. MYERS AND THE CRITICAL FUNCTION: Rebuke and Reply 328

POETRY PRIZES FOR THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN 334

THE SHAKESPEARE INDUSTRY: PROGRESS REPORT, *Shakespeare Survey* 2, reviewed by R. G. COX (p. 335). THE LOGIC OF CHRISTIAN DISCRIMINATION, *Poetry and Personal Responsibility*, by George Every, reviewed by F. R. Leavis (p. 339). ART: THE RELIGION AND THE SAINT, *Recollections of Logan Pearsall Smith* reviewed by H. A. Mason (p. 344).

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'SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT'

SIR Gawain and the Green Knight is a great English poem. It has not so much been simply neglected as it has suffered the wrong kind of attention, the kind of attention that has perpetuated its essential neglect as a poem. For it would, indeed, be hard to say what in the nature of the poem itself exactly it is that has ever been attended to. The attention has not been a literary-critical attention, the attention that is appropriate to a poem. It has been of the kind that has tended to obscure rather than to expose the poem itself, a directing of attention away from the poem towards extrinsic matters, an interposition of pedantic irrelevances between the poem and the reader, an elaborate evasion of its significance. The poem has never been attended to as what in itself it uniquely is.

The mere mechanics of deciphering the text are, it may be admitted, troublesome. That is not simply because its language is a dialect of English (that of the North West Midlands) which is not the dialect which became our English; it is because (to speak out bluntly) of the unintelligent way in which the poem has been edited. The edition at present used by students and on which they are examined (it is, of course, the *edition* rather than the *poem* they are examined on) merely slavishly reproduces the deficiencies, confusions and inconsistencies of the copyist's spelling in the Cotton Nero IX MS. That kind of thing could have been done better by making photostat copies of the MS. itself for the university libraries. The introduction and lengthy, mostly irrelevant notes, which further overlay the poem in this edition (as in most other editions of so-called Middle English texts), illustrate again the depressing 'scholarly' technique of interposing extrinsic 'points of interest' between the reader and the poem and so distracting attention from the poem itself to these interposed obstacles; as if the significance of a great poem were not in itself the most difficult thing in the world to grasp without the deliberate obtrusion and exaggeration of external 'difficulties.' It seems the editors were themselves unaware of the significance and value of the poem they were editing. It is time the universities looked a little into the kind of thing they are responsible for.[1]

What little show of criticism of the poem there has been seems to have been governed by the determination to relate it to the mediæval French romances. It is certainly a part of the function

[1]The old E.E.T.S. edition which has been supplanted by Tolkien and Gordon's remains much the better edition to read the poem in, if only it were made generally available.

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of criticism to see a poem in its place in relation to other poems. Seeing the poem as what in itself it is will indeed be simultaneous with seeing it in the place it establishes for itself in the order which all poems (it may be agreed) establish in relation to each other. The place of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—and *because* it is a great poem it is a central place—is in the English tradition. It belongs to the first great creative moment of (I shall dare to say) *modern* English literature—the moment of the *Canterbury Tales* and of *Piers Plowman*. These three English poems, though robustly independent from each other, are not accidentally contemporary. Their very unlikeness to each other is a guarantee of the integrity, the individuality, the uniqueness of each. They are each different, as Ben Jonson is different from Shakespeare. But they have the same kind of relation to each other—and indeed to Shakespeare and to Ben Jonson—as Ben Jonson has to Shakespeare. When the important regional differences have been allowed for, they remain English poems; they have in common what is, as a whole, the same English community; they are nourished (allowing fully for their regional differences) by a common English soil. For *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the crown, the masterpiece of a whole school of poetry—the alliterative poetry of the North West of England—contemporary with Chaucer and Langland, distinct from either, but equally an important, though less recognized, element in the English tradition. I refer not only to the poems which appear in the same MS. with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—*Cleanness, Patience* and *The Pearl*[2]—but also to such poems as the alliterative *Morte Arthure, The Aunters of Arthure at the Tarn Wadling* and *The Destruction of Troy*.

There is no use my ignoring my feeling that the 'scholarly' concern to derive this superb English poem from French romances (even if the very existence of these has to be hypothetical), while allowing that somehow it goes one better than they do, has been such as, in effect, insidiously to belittle it. By establishing the 'derivativeness' of any given poem, or the limiting 'conditions' within which it had to be composed, it becomes more easy safely to do it down, to ignore its uniqueness, what it does that no other poem does. To attend to an assortment of French romances and Celtic tales is not at all the same thing as to attend to *Sir Gawain and the*

[2]To suppose as a matter of course or probability that because these poems appear in the same MS and dialect they are—on these grounds alone—by the same author is quite uncritical. Yet that is what the scholars who make a property of Middle English literature—detaching it from the rest of English literature for the purpose—do not hesitate to do. It is another instance of the uselessness of scholarship which is unqualified by a literary training and sensibility and unguided by a literary-critical discipline. What can be said is that in this particular locality there was a whole school of poetry; and that that poetry is such that it implies a cultivated society.

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Green Knight; just as to attend to Holinshed's Chronicle is not at all the same thing as to attend to *Macbeth*. To summarize the 'plots' of these French romances and of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and to attend to and compare these summaries is still less the same thing as to attend to and compare the poems themselves. Such methods are a short cut to nowhere; they are not the methods of literary criticism. Yet to suppose that a task of critical elucidation and value has been accomplished by such comparisons of summaries is a form of self deception that has been exceptionally prevalent among literary scholars discussing mediæval texts.

There is no need to deny that the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* may have had a French romance before him, just as Shakespeare has *his* 'sources.' It is unlikely that he did *not* read (or listen to) French romances. But even if we establish that a French romance (or group of romances) was the poem's *literary* source, we have got no nearer the poem itself. The poem is clearly not *just* a courtly romance, and it is totally a very different kind of thing from a French romance. Yet the sheer unlikeness of the English alliterative poem to all the French romances we have has not discouraged the attachment of apparently supreme importance to the relating of it to 'French Romance.' It is as if the placing of some of Shakespeare's plays in the context of the 'Italian Novel' were to be regarded as the function of Shakespearean criticism. The particular French romances which are not there for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to be derived from are lightheartedly assumed to have been there and to have been lost.[3] These hypothetical romances are discussed in relation to the poem almost as if they, rather than it, had a real existence.

Our task is to see the object, the English poem as what it positively is, and that is not, of course, the abstracted 'story'. If the value were in the 'story' in itself, then our editors' summary of it in the forefront of their edition would be all that we should require to read. It is what is made of the 'story', how it is realized, the kind of significance it is made to bear, what the poem totally communicates or does that is our object. To judge from the abstracted 'story' Morgan le Fay is the *cause* of all the events. Yet in the poem itself she is not at all felt to account for these events.[4] To do so she would have had to be realized as Lady Macbeth is realized. Her envy of Guinevere would have had to be as real a force, present in the texture of the poem, as the Macbeths' ambition. But it is not. The old woman of the Second Fit of the poem *is* realized, and at the end of the whole poem Gawain is told that she was Morgan. But where the old woman occurs the

[3]One of the curiosities of Tolkien and Gordon's introduction is a diagram in which letters of the alphabet represent French originals that do not exist but are assumed to have existed. It is one of the things which candidates for the London English Honours B.A. annually memorise.

[4]*Pace* Tolkien and Gordon's Introduction. Pg. XI.

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point is not that she is Morgan, but simply that she is an old woman. What the significance of the old woman is, in contrast to the young woman, will, of course, have to be considered in any critical analysis of the poem. The 'explanation'—Morgan's envy of Guinevere—introduced rather perfunctorily at the end of the poem (from the literary source or 'authority', perhaps) is, in effect, no more than a bone for the rationalizing mind to play with and be kept quiet with.

Yet though we may dismiss the abstracted 'story' as of no value in itself, we may well ask how it is that this particular rendering of the 'story' (or combination of 'stories') has turned out to be a great unified work of art. For the English poem has the unity of a very completed, very deliberately constructed and finished work of art. But not just constructed. The unity is more than a construction; it has the character of an organic unity, a unity of growth. A conscious and deliberate artist (bearing, perhaps, the same kind of relation to his subject matter as we imagine Homer does) the poet has constructed. But in so doing he has, as it were, co-operated with some inner organizing, unifying and realizing principle of life and growth. The result is both a satisfying surface completeness and a full-bodied, matured completion or fulfilment. We may perhaps legitimately begin by inquiring generally what this principle of life might be that has activated the genius of the poet and made the poem the remarkable Shakespearean unity it is, though only an analysis of the poem itself can more exactly define its nature.

It is a case in which the literary critic may appropriately find his initial hint in some of the observations of the anthropologists, provided he recognizes that that does not relieve him from his own responsibility and function of literary criticism, criticism of the particular poem as in itself it in fact is. Miss J. L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and *The Quest of the Grail*—to a lesser extent the chapters on the Folk Drama in E. K. Chambers's *Mediæval Stage*—provide exactly the hint we may have been looking for. Our poem is clearly a midwinter festival poem. The seasonal theme (as any detailed analysis of the poem will bear out) is the poem's underlying, indeed pervasive theme.

The Green Knight whose head is chopped off at his own request and who is yet as miraculously or magically alive as ever, bears an unmistakable relation to the Green Man—the Jack in the Green[5] or the Wild Man of the village festivals of England and Europe. He *is* in fact no other than a recrudescence in poetry of the Green Man. Who the Green Man is is well established. He is the descendent of the Vegetation or Nature god of (whatever his local name) almost universal and immemorial tradition whose death and resurrection

[5]Represented by the lad wreathed in hawthorn, a walking bush, in the May Day village festivals. The leafy screens carried by the restoration army in *Macbeth*, Birnam Wood advancing on Macbeth's castle, have certainly a related symbolic significance.

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mythologizes the annual death and re-birth of nature—in the East the dry and rainy seasons, in Europe winter and spring. The episode (the First Fit of our poem) in which the Green Knight rides into the hall of Arthur's castle among the courtly company at the Christmas feast and demands to have his head chopped off is exactly a Christmas pageant play or interlude—a castle version of the village Folk Play—become real. The central episode of the traditional Folk Play, Sword Dance and Morris Dance was (as Chambers shows) a mock beheading or slaying followed by a revival or restoration to life (often by the Doctor who administered to the corpse the contents of an outsize bottle—the elixir of life).

A recently published book by C. J. P. Cave, *Roof Bosses in Mediæval Churches,* has come very conveniently to hand to demonstrate the vitality of the Green Man in mediæval England. Mr. Cave's photography has revealed very distinctly carvings on the roofs of cathedrals and parish churches which could previously only be distinguished through field glasses, or in some cases, because in shadow, have never been seen till this day. Ecclesiastics walking down below could not have seen what the carver was doing up there (60 or 70 feet up); he could carve what he liked. What he did carve again and again (as Mr. Cave's photographs wonderfully reveal) was a face with leaves sprouting from the corners of its mouth, its eye-lids, eye-brows and ears, the face of the Green Man.[6]

The other protagonist, the Sir Gawain of our poem, is correspondingly related to a traditional Gawain who (Miss Weston tells us) did not originally belong among Arthur's knights any more than does the Green Knight. Gawain's traditional rôle (she convincingly establishes) was that of the hero, the agent who brought back the spring, restored the frozen life-processes, revived the god—or (in later versions) cured the king. Though there is no mention of that in our poem, there are other poems in which Sir Gawain is mysteriously spoken of as having the skill of a healer or doctor—not one of the usual skills of courtly knighthood.

The winter landscape through which, in our poem, Sir Gawain rides on his quest for the Green Chapel, where on New Year's Day he is to renew his acquaintance with the Green Knight, is again the northern European Waste Land, the land that has been (not, as in the east, dried up) frozen up. If it is (implicitly) 'enchantment' which the land suffers from in our poem, it is the kind it suffers from every winter in the north of Europe; it is frozen up.

There are some unexpected underground resemblances (which may be glanced at here in transition) between Sir Gawain and Piers. Piers the Plowman—in one part of Langland's poem described as 'the leche of life' and associated with the seasonal cycle—is identified with Christ, and Christ is the hero who (in Passus XVIII) harrows Hell, releases imprisoned life, restores the dead,

[6]It can scarcely be accidental that so many village pubs in England are called The Green Man.

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Lord of life and of light.

It is the Easter theme; the dreamer, appropriately, awakes to the sound of the Easter bells. The episode has *its* dramatic counterpart, too, the Harrowing of Hell of the Miracle Plays.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is of course, near the surface, a Christian poem. But it is Christian rather as some of the mediæval Christmas carols are Christian, as Christmas itself is Christian; Christian in harmony with pre-Christian nature belief and ritual, a Christian re-interpretation of these. It is Christian to about the same depth as it is a courtly romance. The value of 'courtesy'—Sir Gawain is among other things the pattern of courtesy, the most courteous of Arthur's courtly company—is certainly one of the values defined in the poem and brought out in relation to the other values in their order, Christian and pre-Christian; and these other values are pre-courtly.

The fundamental feeling or *knowledge* in the poem, the hidden source which the poet has tapped, the ultimate source of the poem's actuality, strength and coherence, is the knowledge, which the age-old experience of the race has turned into an assured knowledge, that there is life inexhaustible at the roots of the world even in the dead season, that there is perpetually to be expected the unexpected spring re-birth. The whole poem is, in its very texture—its imagery and rhythm—an assertion of belief in *life* as contrasted with winter deprivation and death; and it seems finally to discover, within the antagonism between man and nature, between the human and the other-than-human, an internal harmony, even a kind of humorous understanding.

There might be no great impropriety in describing as Elizabethan the poem's completeness of delighted acceptance and vivid consciousness of profane life as that takes the senses in rich colour and decorative pattern, in costly magnificence of costume and tapestry, jewellery and embroidery, in elaborate and subtle craftsmanship in metal, wood and stone; and of life also as it expresses itself in ceremonial banqueting, pageantry, music and 'carolling' (dancing and singing in unison) and in the strenuous physical exertions and hazards of tourneying and hunting; gay, Homeric laughter recurs throughout the scenes in the castles. Yet the rich and exuberant imagery of the poem is strictly controlled by the inner intention; it has its symbolic value in relation to the main, the 'life' significance. The jewellery and embroidery, for example, are related to the underlying fertility theme, contrasted with the chastity theme, as the feasting and generous hospitality in the castles contrast with the winter dearth.

The poem depends for its local effects largely upon sheer weight and heaped-up pressure of language[7]—a piling-up of language that contrasts with Chaucer's civilized simplicity—masses of bright colours and concatenations of differentiated sounds. But it is not

[7]One of my Exeter students once counted that there are 20 different words for a man in the poem.

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just lavishness and excess; it is all built into an art as firm as Ben Jonson's; it is even Shakespearean in the way it is all unfalteringly, unerringly controlled towards a total inclusive significance.

The poem is in four Fits. It opens at once on the note of the indestructibility and perpetual renewal of life. Arthur's castle is placed in history as one of the phoenixes of Troy, the utterly destroyed city—

> The borg brittened and brent to brondes and askes

—from which the so many new cities and kingdoms of the Western World have sprung.

> On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settes wyth wynne.

Among these there is this kingdom of Britain where joy and trouble —like winter and spring—have many times alternated.

Then the poem begins to move with a superb impression of the Christmas and New Year festivals at Arthur's castle.

> This kyng lay at Camylot upon Krystmasse
> With mony luflych lorde, ledes of the best,
> Rekenly of the Rounde Table alle tho rich brether,
> With rich revel oryght and rechles merthes.
> Ther tournayed tulkes by tymes ful mony,
> Justed ful jolile thise gentyle knightes,
> Sythen kayred to the court caroles to make.
> For ther the fest was ilyche ful fiften dayes,
> With alle the mete and the mirthe that men couthe avyse;
> Such glaum ande gle glorious to here,
> Dere dyn upon day, daunsyng on nyghtes,
> Al was hap upon heghe in halles and chambres
> With lordes and ladies, as levest him thoght.
> With alle the wele of the worlde thay woned ther samen,
> The most kyd knyghtes under Krystes selven,
> And the lovelokkest ladies that ever lif haden,
> And he the comlokest kyng that the court haldes;
> For al was this fayre folk in her first age, on sille,
> The hapnest under heven,
> Kyng hyghest mon of wylle;
> Hit were now gret nye to neven
> So hardy a here on hille.
>
> Wyle New Yer was so yep that hit was new cummen,
> That day doubble on the dece was the douth served,
> Fro the kyng was cummen with knyghtes into the halle,
> The chauntré of the chapel cheved to an ende.
> Loude crye was ther kest of clerkes and other,
> Nowel nayted onewe, nevened ful ofte;
> And sythen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,
> Geghed yeres-yiftes on high, yelde hem bi hond,
> Debated busyly aboute tho giftes;
> Ladies laghed ful loude, thogh thay lost haden,

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And he that wan was not wrothe, that may ye wel trawe.
Alle this mirthe thay maden to the mete tyme;
When thay had waschen worthyly thay wenten to sete,
The best burne ay abof, as hit best semed,
Quene Guenore, ful gay, graythed in the myddes,
Dressed on the dere des, dubbed al aboute,
Smal sendal besides, a selure hir ouer
Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe,
That were enbrawded and beten wyth the best gemmes
That myght be preved of prys wyth penyes to bye, in daye.
The comlokest to discrye
Ther glent with eyen gray,
A semloker that ever he sye
Soth moght no mon say.

Bot Arthure wolde not ete til al were served,
He was so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered:
His lif liked hym lyght, he lovied the lasse
Auther to longe lye or to longe sitte,
So bisied him his yonge blod and his brayn wylde.

The fulness and vividness of life is there both in the imagery and in the rhythm. The alliterative lines build up (here and in the whole poem) into massive stanzaic paragraphs each concluding with a quartet of short rhymed lines which releases the reader momentarily before he is again caught up into the rhythmic energy of the succeeding paragraph. This superb poetry does not merely describe; its strong ringing rhythm *communicates* keen positive enjoyment of maximum life in its flowering prime. The youthfulness of Arthur and of Arthur's folk—

For al was this fayre folk in her first age

—introduces the theme of youth in contrast to age which is an aspect of the spring-winter (or New Year-Old Year) theme. The poem thus launched is sustained right through as a Christmas-New Year festival poem. The note of feasting—contrasted with the winter deprivation experienced by Gawain on his journey in the Second and Fourth Fits—keeps recurring. Compared with this poem's expression of the jollity, the confident belief in life of the mediæval English folk (one need not in this respect differentiate the castle folk from the village folk) much poetry since the Elizabethan sounds melancholy and weak.

Arthur looks for a marvel, Christmas being the season of marvels (what could be more marvellous than a birth in the dead season) and indeed the ceremonial banquet has hardly commenced, the first course brought in with 'crakkyng of trumpes', when

Ther hales in at the halle dor an aghlich mayster.

He is no mummer disguised as a Green Knight who rides into the hall; he *is* the Green Knight.

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The huge impression—the Green Knight on the green horse—is massively built up. He is not just faerie but robustly substantial and a fiercely humorous character. The emphasis on his glittering array—the jewel-like greenness of his green colour and that of his horse, the glittering green jewellery, the rich embroidery of multiplied 'bryddes and flyghes'—is unmistakably significant of life resurgent. But more considered recognition of this significance had better be postponed till we come to the counterpart, in the structural balance, of the description of the Green Knight, the arming of Sir Gawain in the Second Fit. This predilection for jewels, for example, is certainly not just the influence of the lapidaries or an interest in what the contemporary jewellers and goldsmiths had to offer.

The 'vegetation' aspect of the Green Knight will be immediately recognized. His green beard is like a bush, and together with his long green hair covers his chest and back all round down to his elbows. He carries a holly branch in one hand—

> a holyn bobbe
> That is grattest in grene when greves are bare

—and in the other a huge axe (the weapon fertility symbol). He is as green as green verdure. It would indeed be singular not to feel that he is an up-cropping in poetry of the old vegetation god. After his head has been chopped off he is as vigorously alive as before, like a pollard tree, like John Barleycorn in the old ballads against whom came 'three kings from the West, their victory to try,' and who, though killed and buried, 'sprang up again. And that surprised them all'.

My own experience is that the reader instinctively feels him to be an intruder from a pre-Christian, pre-courtly world. Something of the old untamed, unreclaimed north of Europe has come back here (though the Green Knight will be discovered not merely to typify the destructive, menacing aspects of wild nature hostile to pioneering humans in their struggle to maintain their clearings in forests and swamps). He carries no knightly arms but wields a Danish axe—the stress is on the primitive and heathen nature of the weapon. A 'salvage' intruder, he 'breaks the good feast', disturbs the ceremonious courtly order with his presence and his challenge; the contrast is, at one level, between 'nature' and 'sophistication'. He evokes a half-amused, half-horrified fascination. If he is life, he is wild, uncouth, raw life. His demeanour and his behaviour in this castle of courtesy are outrageously discourteous; he behaves, as if radically a 'villeyn', with contemptuous humorous rudeness. In essence he is the *other*—the other than human.

> The renk on his rounce hym ruched in his sadel,
> And runischly his rede yen he reled aboute,
> Bende his bresed browes blycande grene,
> Wayved his berde for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse.
> When non wolde kepe hym with carp he coghed ful hye,

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Ande rimed hym ful richley, and ryght hym to speke:
'What, is this Arthures hous', quoth the hathel thenne,
'That al the rous renes of thurgh ryalmes so mony?
Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?'

The challenge, to who will, to chop off his head—'For it is Yol and New Yer'—on condition that he who dares to do so will submit to have his own head chopped off on New Year's Day a year hence by the survivor (if the Green Knight *should* survive with his head off) is accepted by Gawain, Arthur's sister's son, the pattern of courtesy, the Prince.

The dismembering act is gruesome enough. There is blood in the Green Man ('For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale').[8] The courtly company kick away the head as it rolls towards them. That is not cruelty or even, perhaps, simply horror; the head of the sacrificed beast in fertility rituals was believed pregnant with magical powers.[9]

That the bit of the broun stel bot on the grounde.
The fayre hede fro the halce hit to the erthe,
That fele hit foyned wyth her fete, there hit forth roled;
The blod brayd fro the body, that blykked on the grene;
And nauther faltered ne fel the freke never the helder,
Bot stythly he start forth upon styf schonkes,
And runyschly he racht out, there as renkkes stoden,
Lacht to his lufly hed, and lyft hit up sone;
And sythen boges to his blonk, the brydel he cachches,
Steppes into stelbawe and strydes alofte,
And his hede by the here in his honde haldes.

The impacts of the axe and of the head on the ground are felt in the ' bit . . . bot . . . hit' of the first and second lines.

The chopping off of his own head is to this amazing fellow but a 'Crystemas gomen'. With a savage yell ('a runisch rout') he flings out of the hall, fire struck from the flints by his horse's hooves. Fire, later, is also struck from the hooves of Gawain's horse; and the flicker of fire in the *other* castle (of the Second and Third Fits) is too frequent to have an accidental significance.

The opening paragraphs of the Second Fit, superbly conveying an impression of the changing seasons, the revolving year, are not mere decoration. They are integral to the poem; they rise from the core of the unifying seasonal experience. We are not just told that a year has passed; we experience the year changing, the alternating pattern of the seasons.

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[8]Autolycus' song in *A Winter's Tale*.

[9]The anthropologists tell us that our game of football is derived from the struggle for possession of the head which, buried in the earth, would make the land fertile, the crops rich. In this case, however, the head is (very naturally) spurned.

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Bot thagh the ende be hevy, haf ye no wonder;
For thagh men ben mery in mynde when thay han mayn drynk,
A yere yernes ful yerne, and yeldes never lyke,
The forme to the fynisment foldes ful selden.
Forthi this Yol overyede, and the yere after,
And uche sesoun serlepes sued after other:
After Crystenmasse com the crabbed lentoun,
That frayste flesch wyth the fysche and fode more symple;
Bot thenne the weder of the worlde wyth wynter hit threpes,
Colde clenges adoun, cloudes uplyften,
Schyre schedes the rayn in schowres ful warme,
Falles upon fayre flat, flowers there schewen,
Bothe groundes and the greves grene ar her wedes,
Bryddes busken to bylde, and bremlych syngen
For solace of the softe somer that sues therafter bi bonk;
And blossumes bolne to blowe
Bi rawes rych and ronk,
Then notes noble innowe
Ar herde in wod so wlonk.

After, the sesoun of somer wyth the soft wyndes,
When Zeferus syfles hymself on sedes and erbes;
Wela wynne is the wort that waxes theroute,
When the donkande dewe dropes of the leves,
To bide a blysful blusche of the bryght sunne.
Bot then hyes hervest, and hardenes hym sone,
Warnes hym for the wynter to wax ful rype;
He dryves wyth droght the dust for to ryse,
Fro the face of the folde to flye ful hyghe:
Wrothe wynde of the welkyn wrasteles with the sunne,
The leves lancen fro the lynde and lyghten on the grounde,
And al grayes the gres that grene was ere;
Thenne al rypes and rotes that ros upon fyrst,
And thus yirnes the yere in yisterdayes mony,
And wynter wyndes agayn, as the worlde askes . . .

The Shakespearean phrases ('al rypes and rotes' . . . 'in yisterdayes mony') remind the modern reader that the language of the poem is radically the same language as Shakespeare's. The analogy with human life—human life has its seasons—an analogy familiar to us in Shakespeare underlies the melancholy note of transience. The harmony between man and nature is here a harmony in their common fate of transience. Spring and summer, though vividly rejoiced in, are episodes in the perpetual process of change. The day approaches when Gawain must set off on his quest for the Green Chapel to keep his tryst with the Green Knight there on New Year's Day and take the return blow. The concluding emphasis is on the waning of the year. The year's revolution has, however, brought round again the Christmas-New Year season. The poem is thus

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maintained right through as a Christmas and New Year festival poem.

The arming of Sir Gawain, which (as already observed), corresponds, in the structural balance, to the description of the Green Knight, is also not mere decoration; it is not just the mediæval romancer and his castle audience's interest in knightly accoutrement, armour and weapons. The representatives of life, including the youthful hero whose task it is to bring back life, have always (the anthropologists tell us) been glittering figures. The throng of dancing youths who in the ancient rituals accompanied the god, the Maruts of India, the Corybantes and Couretes of the Greeks, the Salii of the Romans—the predecessors of the Sword Dancers and Morris Dancers of more recent folk festivals—were glitteringly arrayed; in their dances, designed to stimulate the reproductive energies of nature, they carried flashing weapons, symbolical of fertility. In Sir Gawayn's array, and that of his horse, red colour, as distinguished from the gleaming green of his opposite, and gold—

That al glytered and glent as glem of the sun

—predominate. There is again a profusion of jewels and a silk embroidery of birds—'papiayes' and 'tortors'—

As mony burde theraboute had ben seven wynter.

His array thus associates Gawain also with life resurgent.

Nor is it accidental that Sir Gawain's emblem is the pentangle, an ancient life symbol. It appears as one of the figures on the Tarot Pack. It was believed (Miss Weston tells us) to 'give power over the other world'.[10] The Sword Dancers, as they enclose the head in their mock beheading, make the figure of the pentangle; as the dancers 'hold up the sign, they cry triumphantly "A nut! a nut!" '.[11] In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* the pentangle has acquired a Christian significance; but the pre-Christian significance unmistakably underlies and is active in the poem.

The winter landscape through which Gawain now rides on his quest for the Green Chapel is again not mere decorative background to a romance; it is the northern European Waste Land. That is to say, it is actual winter as it may be experienced any winter among the mountains of North Wales after a blizzard. The geography of Gawain's search for the Green Chapel is, and is intended to be,

[10]The significance of the pentangle (Faust's 'Druid's foot' that kept Mephisto from crossing the threshold) is preserved in the 'Five for the symbol at your door' of the old English counting-song *Green Grow the Rushes O,* where also Two is 'for the lilly-white boys clothèd all in green, O'.

[11]*From Ritual to Romance,* p. 93.

'Nut' means 'knot'—as in the game 'nuts in May' which means 'breast-knots or nosegays in May'; in our poem it is said that the English call the pentangle 'the endeles knot'.

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significant, or why else should we be told in such detail how he left the court in Somerset (Arthur's court representing the centre of Christian culture, civilization) to search Wales? And right through Wales to Anglesey—the Druid country, the home of the pre-Christian culture, the ancient religion of Britain, and where Gawain was the favourite hero and whence the original Gawain legend came—and so to the Wirral? After that the whereabouts of his wanderings becomes necessarily a mystery. The point is that Gawain *expected* the Green Chapel and the Green Man to be where the cult belonged, perhaps survived. And this specification of the real countryside of the quest makes Gawain's subsequent wanderings in the waste full of monsters more blood-chilling: it prevents the reader from feeling he is merely in the stock fairy-tale world of romance and can discount the horrors—Gawain's waste is felt to be real and perilous indeed.

The actuality of the experience of desolation—Gawain's experience of being a stranger in a mountainous frozen region—depends upon the actuality of this winter landscape. The experience is sharply distinct because the landscape which is its 'objective equivalent' is (in contrast to the indefinite dream landscapes of the *Faerie Queene*) sharply distinct. It is a landscape from which God (originally perhaps the god) appears to have withdrawn, a landscape desolate of humans, inhabited by un-human creatures, beasts and monsters against which Gawain must hazard his life. The succession of tests which Gawain will undergo has commenced. 'The test preceding and qualifying for initiation into the secrets of physical life, consisted in being brought into contact with the horrors of physical death'. (J. L. Weston, *The Quest of the Grail.*)

The actuality of this ice-bound universe—so vividly immediate in the poetry—is itself dependent upon distinctness and accuracy of sensation, on the sharpness or piercingness of the sensory impressions and the subtlety with which these are distinguished and differentiated.

> When the colde cler water fro the cloudes schadde,
> And fres er hit falle myght to the falé erthe;
> Ner slayn wyth the slete he sleped in his yrnes
> Mo nyghtes then innoghe in naked rokkes,
> Ther as claterande fro the crest the colde borne rennes,
> And henged hegh over his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.

'In his iron . . . on the naked rocks'—no acuter impression of the cold endured by Gawain could be conceived or communicated in words.

But from among these rocks, on the morning of Christmas Eve, Sir Gawain enters a forest. The trees of the Sacred Wood (they are the traditionally sacred trees) are full of suffering, half-frozen birds.

> Of hore okes ful hoge a hundreth togeder;
> The hasel and the hawthorne were harled al samen,
> With roghe raged mosse rayled aywhere,

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With mony bryddes unblythe upon bare twyges,
That pitosly ther piped for pyne of the colde.

The intimate mediæval fellow-feeling for the birds—felt almost as another kind of humans—seems to restore a whole range of human feeling; sympathetic feelings that had been frozen up un-freeze.[12] The Christian knight, remembering that it is Christmas Eve, prays to Christ and Mary for some lodging where he might hear mass and matins on Christmas morning.

To se the servyse of that syre, that on that self nyght
Of a burde was borne oure baret to quelle;
And therfore sykyng he sayde, 'I beseche the, lorde,
And Mary, that is myldest moder so dere,
Of sum herber ther heghly I myght here masse,
Ande thy matynes to-morne, mekely I ask'.

As if in answer to his prayer he is confronted with the miracle of a castle. It is an ancient experience of the race. You are crossing a desert; you look again and (as by magic) the desert is a garden, a paradise—as desert land may (often does) become quite suddenly after rainfall. So here, unexpectedly, in the Waste Land is a castle where the knight, after deprivation, will be entertained with abundance of food and drink. The castle is unmistakably a version of the Grail Castle. (There is no mention of the Grail in our poem; but always associated with the fleeting appearances of the Grail, the life-giving vessel, are just such windfalls of food and drink.)

In contrast to the rocks the castle seems almost fragile, as if it might vanish again in an instant by magic.

Chalkwhyt chymnes . . .
That pared out of papure purely hit semed.

But it is multiplex in detail,[13] a multiplicity of towers and turrets, signifying again fertility—as innumerable stalks thrust upward from the ground in spring—and colourful as flowers are. It is islanded by water, oasis-like in effect. Gawain is here nearer than he knows to the hidden source of life.

In the structural balance of the poem this castle balances, on the one hand, the Green Chapel of the Fourth (and final) Fit—Gawain has come first not to a chapel but a castle—on the other

[12]The moment is nearly analogous to the moment in the *Ancient Mariner* when 'A spring of love gushed from my heart . . .' The albatross which suddenly appeared in the icy desolation ('Thorough the fog it came, As if it had been a Christian soul . . .') is life, and in destroying it the Mariner committed a crime against life. The moment, in the purgatorial process, has come when the Mariner suddenly recovers his love for living creatures. " The self-same moment I could pray . . .'

[13]The editors here interpose the red herring of 14th century castle architecture.

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hand, Arthur's castle. The lord of this *other* castle (Sir Bercilak de la Hautdesert—the surname is perhaps significant) will, in the Fourth Fit, turn out to be the Green Knight. Between the robust and boisterous lord of the castle, a huge man of mature age, and the Green Knight, there is a concealed resemblance, allowing that the colour of his beard is now reddish brown and not green.

> Brode, brycht, was his berde, and al bever-hued.
> Felle face as the fyre . . .

His association with fire has unmistakably the same kind of significance that the fire festivals had; the flicker of fire—fire light and torch light—is (as previously remarked) characteristic of this castle. Gawain and the Green Knight of the First Fit have here in the Second Fit in some respects changed places. After he has been clothed in fresh garments[14] the youthful Gawain looks like the spring.

> The Ver by his visage verayly hit semed
> Welnegh to uche hathel, alle on hues,
> Lowande and lufly alle his lymmes under. . . .

It is as if the spring itself has come to the castle and been welcomed. As a guest, Gawain is restored to the warmth of human hospitality before the Yule fire.

> A cheyer byfore the chemne, ther charcole brenned.

As the plentiful food and drink with which—in this hostelry of the Green Man—Gawain is generously refreshed contrasts with the winter deprivation, so also the domestic comfort and sumptuousness of the interior of the castle contrasts with the inhospitable rocks. In return, Sir Gawain is to the folk in the castle the pattern of courtesy, 'the fyne fader of nurture'.

There are in the castle a young woman and an old woman. The lady hostess, Sir Bercilak's wife, is youthful and lovely.

> Thenne lyst the lady to loke on the knyght,
> Thenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdes.
> Ho was the fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre,
> And of compas and colour and costes of alle other,
> And wener then Wenore, as the wyghe thoght.

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[14]We may compare those who have 'suffered a sea-change' in *The Tempest*.

> 'But the rarity of it is, which is indeed almost beyond credit . . . that our garments, being, as they were, drenched in the sea, hold notwithstanding their freshness and glosses, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt-water'.

The rebirth significance of the change of garments will be familiar enough.

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She is accompanied, however, by another lady who in contrast to her is old and withered.

> An other lady hir lad bi the lyft honde,
> That was alder than ho, an auncian hit semed,
> And heghly honored with hatheles aboute.
> Bot unlyke on to loke tho ladyes were,
> For if the yonge was yep, yolwe was that other;
> Riche red on that on rayled ayquere,
> Rugh ronkled chekes that other on rolled;
> Kerchofes of that on, wyth mony cler perles,
> Hir brest and hir bryght throte bare displayed,
> Schon schyrer then snawe that schedes on hills;
> That other wyth a gorger was gered over the swyre,
> Chymbled over hir blake chyn wyth chalkwhyte vayles,
> Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
> Toret and treieted with tryfles aboute,
> That noght was bare of that burde bot the blake browes,
> The tweyne eyen and the nase, the naked lyppes,
> And those were soure to se and sellyly blered.

The realism of that reminds one of Villon's hags. Whoever this withered ancient is in the 'story' (she is, as we happen to be told at the very end of the poem, Morgan—originally, the scholars tell us, a Celtic goddess) the point here is immediately the contrast between youth and age, which has its significance in relation to the underlying seasonal theme. Winter is the season when the year has lost its vigour, spring when the year recovers its youth; the year grows old in winter, young again in spring. The one woman is what the other turns into. Age is what youth turns into—the flesh withers. But in relation to the seasonal theme the order is here also reversible; the young woman supplants the old. The old year (in this respect there is doubtless an underground connection with the envy of Morgan) works the mischief, produces the frozen world simply by being old. Underlyingly the old woman and the young woman are the Old and the New Year.[15]

When the feast of Christmas draws to a close Gawain's host tells him he knows where the Green Chapel is—it is close at hand—and bids him rest in the castle for the three days that remain. Again there is a compact. During each of these three days the lord of the castle proposes to be abroad hunting. Each evening Gawain will exchange whatever he may have won during the day in the castle for whatever his host may have won in the chase.

The events of these three days before New Year's Day—the day of Gawain's tryst at the Green Chapel—are the subject of the Third Fit. They are days of apparent resting for Gawain but really of most perilous testing. The peril is the greater because Gawain

[15]Such figures were familiar features of the annual folk festivals. The Romans had their Mamurius Veturius and his female counterpart, Anna Perenna.

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does not know he is being tested; on the contrary, these days have been assigned to relaxation. Yet on his success or failure in these days of testing by the gay, youthful lady, his distractingly lovely hostess, will depend, though he does not guess it, his success or failure, indeed his life, at the Green Chapel. Though the original and still the underlying, purpose of the diverse tests—to find out whether or not Gawain is a fit agent to bring back the spring—is resolved into the conception of a testing of fitness for Christian knighthood, chastity has here nothing very particularly to do with monastic asceticism. Chastity has immemorially been a requirement in fertility—or nature—ceremonies and initiations. The chastity theme—chastity as a pre-condition of fertility—is here complementary to the fertility theme.

The hunts are symbolically the doing-to-death of the qualities of the natural man which Courtesy has to vanquish; the deer is timidity or cowardice, the boar ferocity, the fox animal cunning. Gawain's first natural reaction at the first entrance of the lady is to pretend to be asleep and evade the issue if he can (the deer); at her second visit she invites him to violate her forcefully (the boar); on the third occasion Gawain partially identifies himself with the cunning (the fox) of the proffer of the Green Girdle—which later in the poem he recognizes as having been a snare—by accepting and concealing it. The hunts are thus a symbolic parallel of what Gawain is doing in the castle, in the way of self-conquest, to maintain the ideal of the Christian knight—as well as realistic hunts. The poem implies an audience trained to be on the alert for a symbolic—as well as a literal—meaning; it is what made the poem possible as both sophisticated art and a popular poem. The hunts move successively to a climax which is symbolic; the boar, we should think, would follow the fox, if the crescendo were literal-dramatic and not, as it is, spiritual-symbolic.

Further, the spoils of each day's hunt both correspond, in the exchange, to the kisses of the lady and provide in midwinter the foison, the plenty that is consumed at each evening's feast; for the note of feasting continues right through the Third Fit. The Green Man now appears as the huntsman. The intimate association of vegetable and animal life, of crops and herds, has always been recognized. The three hunts of our poem underlyingly correspond to the animal sacrifices of fertility rituals; they are sacrificial hunts which provision the successive ceremonial feasts. Each hunt has its own character corresponding to the character of the creature hunted; the first day's hunt is a deer hunt, the second a boar hunt, the third a fox hunt. The poem is endlessly various, fertile in diversity of invention.

The three episodes of the testing of Gawain by the lady who each morning steals into his chamber are interwoven with the three hunts. These slow-motion, gay but slyly perilous bed-chamber scenes contrast with the vital activity and rush of the hunts. If we consider only the interweaving and the glowing colours we may be reminded of a tapestry-piece; yet the analogy is inadequate because

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these scenes are not *simply* picture, or processional pageantry, as the scenes in the *Faerie Queene,* so easily dissociable from their intended 'moral' meaning, readily become. The scenes and the people involved in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are substantial, alive and individual; the people—and even the boar and the fox—are real characters.

There is a further complication of rhythm or pattern in this Fit composed by the rotation of each day, slow—dangerously slow—in the castle in Gawain's chamber, swift in the hunt; each day opens with its dawn scene and closes with its evening feast after the day's hunt.

The Third Fit opens with a lively enactment, in strong 'pausing' rhythm, of the animation, the vital movement of the departing guests on the first morning of the lord's three hunts.

> Ful erly bifore the day the folk uprysen,
> Gestes that go wolde hor gromes thay calden,
> And thay busken up bilyve blonkkes to sadel,
> Tyffen her takles, trussen her males,
> Richen hem the rychest, to ryde alle arrayde,
> Lepen up lyghtly, lachen her brydeles.

The startling effect on the wild creatures and the timid deer of the first sounds intimating a hunt is sympathetically apprehended.

> At the fyrst quethe of the quest quaked the wylde;
> Der drof in the dale, doted for drede.

Yet it is the exhilaration of the chase that is primarily communicated; and in that communication sounds, concatenations of sounds, have their full values.

> The hindes were halden in with hay! and war!
> The does dryven with gret dyn to the depe slades . . .
> Hunters wyth hyghe horne hasted hem after
> Wyth such a crakkande kry as klyffes haden brusten.

There is a great plenty of deer (though many are 'hindes barayne'); the significance of that will be plain.

Meanwhile the gay lady steals into Gawain's chamber.

> And as in slomeryng he slode, sleyly he herde
> A litel dyn at his dor, and derfly upon;
> And he heves up his hed out of the clothes,
> A corner of the cortyn he cast up a lyttel,
> And waytes warly thiderwarde quat hit be myght.
> Hit was the ladi, loflyest to beholde,
> That drow the dor after hir ful dernly and stylle,
> And boged towarde the bed; and the burne schamed,
> And layde hym doun lystyly, and let as he slepte;
> And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
> Kest up the cortyn and creped withinne,
> And set hir ful softly on the bed-syde,
> And lenged there selly longe to loke when he wakened.

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The lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle,
Compast in his concience to quat that cace myght
Meve other amount—to mervayle hym thoght,
Bot yet he sayde in hymself, 'More semly hit were
To aspye wyth my spelle in space quat ho wolde.'
Then he wakenede, and wroth, and to hir warde torned,
And unlouked his eye-lyddes, and let as hym wondered,
And sayned hym, as bi his saye the safer to worthe, with hande.
Wyth chynne and cheke ful swete,
Bothe whit and red in blande,
Ful lufly con ho lete
Wyth lyppes smal laghande.

'God moroun, Sir Gawayn', sayde that gay lady,
'Ye ar a sleper unslye, that mon may slyde hider;
Now ar ye tan astyt! Bot true us may schape,
I schal bynde yow in your bedde, that be ye trayst':
Al laghande the lady lanced tho bourdes.
'Goud moroun, gay,' quoth Gawayn the blythe . . .

The humanity of the scene, the humour of Gawain's embarrassment and of his pretending at first to be asleep, distinguishes it absolutely from the 'temptation' scenes in the *Faerie Queene*; the gay laughing lady has more affinity with some of Chaucer's wives.[17] She is (it transpires at the end of the poem) in league with her husband to test the unsuspecting Gawain. The chastity test is complicated not only by its being a test of loyalty—the loyalty of guest to host—but also (much more difficult) a test of courtesy. Gawain has to resist the lady while at the same time not being discourteous to her. There is nothing unreal about this situation. The problem of how to resist different kinds of demands made upon one, without being discourteous, is a very real problem of civilized social behaviour in any community in any age. The theme of the interplay between 'nature' and civilized behaviour—Sir Gawain being the pattern of civilized behaviour or 'courtesy'—attains its maximum insistence in the episode between Sir Gawain and the lady.

Immediately supervening on Gawain's first day's successful resistance we are present at the 'breaking up'—an elaborate ritual—of the finest of the slain deer.[18] Gawain's success each day thus synchronises in the poem with the death of the hunted beast for which he faithfully exchanges the lady's kisses; there are one kiss to be exchanged on the first day, two on the second, three on the third.

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[17]The 'gay wives' of Dunbar's *Twa Marrit Wemen and the Wedo* are also real enough, but by comparison are savage, merciless creatures of instinct.

[18]We may compare this episode, as also the deaths of the boar and fox, with the animal sacrifice at the cave—the entrance to the underworld—in Book VI of the *Aeneid;* the Green Chapel also is a cave.

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On the second day's dawn the castle is awakened by the crowing of a cock (that most mediæval of birds heard more than once in this Christmas festival poem). In the richly orchestrated poetry that renders the strenuous rushing action of the boar-hunt our consciousness of sounds, given substance as they are by imagery of impetuous physical movement, again plays a large part.

> Thenne such a glauer ande glam of gedered rachches
> Ros, that the rokkeres rungen aboute;
> Hunteres hem hardened with horne and with muthe.
> Then al in a semblé sweyed togeder,
> Bitwene a flosche in that fryth and a foo cragge.

The boar is a really formidable antagonist.

> On the sellokest swyn swenged out there . . .
> Ful grymme when he gronyed, thenne greved mony,
> For thre at the fyrst thrast he thryst to the erthe,
> And sparred forth good sped boute spyt more.
> Thise other halowed hyghe! ful hyghe, and hay! hay!
> cryed,
> Haden hornes to mouthe, heterly rechated;
> Mony was the miyry mouthe of men and of houndes . . .

The second of the critical bed-chamber scenes—the second visit of the 'mere wyf', who on this occasion, after she has failed to induce him to constrain her by force, finally begs Gawain to teach her the art of courtly love-making in which, as a knight of Arthur's court, he is erudite—is interposed in this contrasting context; the peril for Gawain is even deadlier than on the first day.

At the moment of our assurance at last of his second day's success we are present at the death of the boar. The terrible event is not merely told about; its savagery is experienced.

> Bot the lorde ouer the londes launced ful ofte,
> Sues his uncely swyn, that swynges bi the bonkkes
> And bote the best of his braches the bakkes in sunder . . .
> He gets the bonk at his bak, bigynes to scrape,
> Whetes his whyte tuskes. . . .

The lord dismounts and, sword in hand, himself tackles the ferocious and maddened beast in a deadly duel; he also, as Gawain does, hazards his life.

> The wylde was war of the wyghe with weppen in honde,
> Hef hyghly the here, so hetterly he fnast
> That fele ferde for the freke, lest felle hym the worre.
> The swyn settes hym out on the segge even,
> That the burne and the bor were bothe upon hepes
> In the wyghtest of the water; the worre hade that other,
> For the mon merkkes hym wel, as thay mette fyrst,
> Set sadly the scharp in the slot even,
> Hit hym up to the hult, that the hert schyndered . . .

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There was blawyng of prys in mony breme horne,
Heghe halowing on highe with hatheles that myght . . .

The boar's head—the head of the sacrificed animal—is brought home to the castle in triumph.

And sythen on a stif stange stoutly hem henges.
Now with this ilk swyn thay swengen to home;
The bores hed was borne bifore the burnes selven.

The 'hoge hed'—exchanged for the two kisses—graces the evening's seasonal feast among flickering torch-light and fire-light.

. . . clere lyght thenne
Wakned bi woges, waxen torches . . .
Aboute the fyre upon flet, and on fele wyse
At the soper and after, mony athel songes,
As coundutes of Krystmasse and caroles newe.

There is quite evidently a cunning relation between the boar's head and the heads of the Green Knight and of Gawain.

On the frosty dawn of the third day, as the sun rises redly against drifting clouds, the horns of the final hunt sound.

Ferly fayre was the folde, for the forst clenged;
In rede rudede upon rak rises the sunne,
And ful clere costes the clowdes of the welkyn.
Hunteres unhardeled bi a holt syde,
Rokkeres roungen bi rys for rurde of her hornes.

The strenuous exertions of this day's hunt are evoked by a fox; that fox is a character, Reynard, the well-known rascally character of the Beast Fables, a rascal to his end. Dogs and men

Runnen forth in a rabel in his ryght fare.

The fox

. . . fyskes hem before; thay founden hym sone,
And when thay seghe hym with syght thay sued hym fast,
Wreyande hym ful weterly with a wroth noyse;
And he trantes and tornayees thurgh mony tene greve,
Havilounes, and herkenes bi hegges ful ofte.
At the last bi a littel dich he lepes ouer a spenne,
Steles out ful stilly bi a strothe rande,
Went haf wylt of the wode with wyles fro the houndes;
Thenne was he went, er he wyst, to a wale tryster,
Ther thre thro at a thrich thrat hym at ones, al graye.
He blenched agayn bileve
And stifly start on-stray,
With alle the wo on lyve
To the wod he went away.

Thenne was hit lif upon list to lythen the houndes,
When alle the mute hade hym met, menged togeder:
Suche a sorwe at that syght thay sette on his hede

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As alle the clamberande clyffes hade clatered on hepes;
Here he was halawed, when hatheles hym metten,
Loude he was gayned with garande speche;
Ther he was threted and ofte thef called,
And ay the titleres at his tayl, that tary he ne myght;
Ofte he was runnen at, when he out rayked,
And ofte reled in agayn, so Reniarde was wylé.
And ye he lad hem, bilagged men, the lorde and his meyny.

Gawain's third and last test with the lady is meanwhile in progress. On this, the day before he must keep his tryst with the Green Knight at the Green Chapel she wakens him from dreams that have been very naturally gloomy. But she is as gay and as distracting as ever.

In a mery mantyle, mete to the erthe . . .
Hir thryven face and hir throte throwen al naked,
Hir brest bare bifore, and bihinde eke . . .
The lady luflych com laghande swete . . .

Now let Mary be mindful of her knight, for his fate at the Green Chapel will depend on how successfully he resists the gay lady here and now. This day's test is, in fact, the decisive test, before his to-morrow's venture into the unknown and unpredictable. He is human. He fails in a minor respect. He successfully resists the lady for the third time but—though he refuses a rich jewelled ring blazing like the sun—she at the very end slyly induces him to accept from her a simple-seeming lovelace, her Green Girdle, which she tells him magically preserves life. He accepts it not as a love-gift and not from essential cowardice, but because he positively wants life. He positively wants, in short, what the poem has made us so vividly apprehend through every nerve and sense.

The death of the fox supervenes upon—is equivalent to—Gawain's partial success, partial failure.

As he sprent ouer a spenne to spye the schrewe,
Ther as he herde the houndes that hasted hym swythe,
Renoud com richchande thurgh a roghe greve,
And alle the rabel in a res ryght at his heles.
The wyghe was war of the wylde, and warly abides,
And braydes out the bryght bronde, and at the best castes.
And he schunt for the scharp, and schulde haf arered;
A rach rapes hym to, ryght er he myght,
And ryght bifore the hors fete thay fel on hym alle,
And woried me this wyly wyth a wroth noyse.
The lorde lyghtes bilyve, and laches hym sone,
Rased hym ful radly out of the rach mouthes,
Haldes heghe ouer his hede, halowes faste,
And ther bayen hym mony brath houndes.

A requiem is sounded for Reynard's soul.

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Alle that ever ber bugle blowed at ones,
And alle thise other halowed that hade no hornes;
Hit was the myriest mute that ever men herde,
The rich rurd that ther was raysed for Renaude saule.

(To-morrow, we may remember, it may be Gawain's turn). Gawain, not to implicate his hostess, says nothing about her gift of her Green Girdle; and the lord apologetically exchanges the pelt of the fox—a mere fox—for the three kisses.

For I haf hunted al this day, and noght haf I geten
Bot this foule fox felle—the fende haf the godes!

The Third Fit draws to a close with the New Year's Eve feast and some natural preoccupation about the morrow.

Gawain's journey through winter in quest of the Green Chapel is resumed in the Fourth (and last) Fit; in the structural balance the Fourth Fit corresponds in this aspect to the Second Fit, as in the final encounter between Gawain and the Green Knight it corresponds to the First Fit. The opening paragraph itself corresponds to the two opening paragraphs of the Second Fit conveying the experience of a year's revolution. The sense of time passing is again conveyed—on this occasion the passing of Old Year's Night into the wintry dawn of the New Year—and it is conveyed in particular terms of the wild weather outside the castle as Gawain listens to it on his bed with foreboding, conscious that his meeting with the Green Knight is now imminent.

Now neghes the New Yere, and the nyght passes,
The day dryves to the derk, as Dryhten biddes;
Bot wylde wederes of the worlde wakned theroute,
Clowdes kesten kenly the colde to the erthe,
Wyth nyghe innoghe of the northe, the naked to tene;
The snaw snitered ful snart, that snayped the wylde;
The werbelande wynde wapped fro the hyghe,
And drof uche dale ful of dryftes ful grete.
The leude lystened ful wel that ley in his bedde,
Thagh he lowkes his liddes, ful lyttel he slepes;
Bi uch kok that crue he knewe wel the steven.

Gawain then rides out again through winter as it may be actually experienced any winter among the mountains.

They bogen bi bonkkes ther boghes ar bare,
Thay clomben bi clyffes ther clenges the colde.
The heven was up halt, bot ugly ther-under;
Mist muged on the mor, malt on the mountes,
Uch hille had a hatte, a myst-hakel huge.
Brokes byled and breke bi bonkkes aboute,
Schyre schaterande on schores, ther thay doun schowved.

One variation is that on this occasion Gawain is accompanied by a guide—the guide provided by his host—and knows that the

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Green Chapel is at hand. As they draw near the place this guide fearfully warns Gawain of the peril and proposes a way of escape. It may be that the guide is well-meaning, or it may be that he, too, is in league with his master. But whether or not deliberately engineered this is certainly yet another test, a test that Gawain at once shows there is no danger of his failing in; he will go on, though courteously he thanks the fellow for his apparently friendly but dishonourable counsel. The guide then rides off, leaving Gawain to go on alone.

Just as no event ever turns out to be exactly as one had expected it, but comes always with the shock of a difference, so the Green Chapel turns out to be quite different. It is not a chapel at all; it is 'nobot an olde cave'.

> And ouergrowen with gresse in glodes aywhere,
> And al was holwe inwith, nobot an olde cave.

Its being a cave—that immemorial symbol and sacred place—is more richly significant than if it had been a chapel. Gawain is here at the hidden, secret source of life. If (as Kittredge suggests) the cave is the entrance to the underworld, that entrance is in our poem realized not as the devourer of life but as the source of life, the entrance through which life *returns* to the earth. The place—it is essentially an experience of a place—is felt as holy, enchanted, taboo; it is *sacer*. Possibly there were in the wilder regions of Britain (as J. L. Weston thinks) such ancient shrines of an earlier nature worship which were still places of worship—at least of veneration or fear—as late as the 14th century. The cave is certainly more appropriate than a Christian chapel to that wild mountain universe, to un-reclaimed, unredeemed nature.

The equivocal attitude of the mediæval Church to nature seems to be reflected in Sir Gawain's attitude. He feels—it is the ancient feeling—that the place is *sacer*, but he feels not simply that; he is not at all sure how to take it, how as a Christian knight he *ought* to take it. The Church's attempt to outlaw the old cults was (we know) what turned them into black magic and devil worship;[19] in Sir Gawain's first reaction to the place we see reflected the kind of attitude that by outlawing the surviving remnants of a nature cult produced witchcraft. Perhaps (Sir Gawain thinks) the cave is the Devil's kirk.

> Here myght aboute mydnyght
> The dele his matynnes telle!

Perhaps the Green Man is after all the Devil (perhaps nature is the Devil!) who has lured him there in order to destroy him.

[19]Recently Christianized peoples could not at once imagine their old gods as not existing; the gods persisted, though outlawed by the Christian Church and turned into devils. The identification of the Green Man with the genial outlaw Robin Hood is significant of the viewpoint contrary to the official ecclesiastical one.

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'This oritore is ugly, with erbes ouergrowen;
Wel bisemes the wyghe wruxled in grene
Dele here his devocioun on the develes wyse.
Now I fele hit is the fende, in my fyve wyttes,
That has stoken me this steven to strye me here.
This is a chapel of meschaunce, that chekke hit bytyde!
Hit is the corsedest kyrk that ever I com inne!'

Gawain's fears are totally disproved by the event. The experience that immediately follows is of a sudden, overwhelming release of life-energies, as of some sudden thaw in which the pent-up, gigantic life beneath the frozen earth bursts free; suggestions of rushing water and wind powerfully contribute to the exhilaration of the experience.

Thene herde he of that hyghe hil, in a harde roche
Biyonde the broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noyse.
Quat! hit clatered in the clyff, as hit cleve schulde,
As one upon a gryndelston hade grounden a sythe.
What! hit wharred and whette, as water at a mulne;
What! hit rusched and ronge, rawthe to here.

It is the Green Man sharpening his axe. Presently he comes

Whyrlande out of a wro wyth a felle weppen,
A Denes ax newe dyght, the dynt with to yelde

and leaps hugely across the intervening stream. The chief actors in the poem—essentially the hero and the god, man and nature—now again, as in the First Fit, confront each other. The final test is executed by the Green Man with grim humour—two feints and a blow that merely grazes the skin, shedding a few symbolic drops of blood on the snow. For the Green Man turns out not to be such a bad fellow after all. He could have destroyed Gawain, but does not. In effect, therefore, he gives Gawain his life; he does not, as he so easily could, take it away, though it remains certain that if Gawain had failed in the tests with the lady he would have forfeited his life. His life is really in the balance. The graze is for his fault in accepting and concealing the Green Girdle.

Bot for ye lufed your lyf; the lasse I yow blame.

There follows immediately an impression as of a re-birth.

And when the burne segh the blode blenk on the snawe,
He sprit forth spenne-fote more than a spere lenthe,
Hent heterly his helme, and on his hed cast,
Schot with his schulderes his fayre schelde under,
Braydes out a bryght sworde, and bremely he spekes—
Never syn that he was burne borne of his moder
Was he never in this worlde wyghe half so blythe.

What is achieved seems to be a kind of adjustment, if not reconciliation[20] between man and nature, between the human and the other

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than human. In a more limited sense, the courtly order has been put to the test of nature. Gawain recognizes his own nature, knows himself, as a consequence.

The Christian significance of the poem is that Gawain emerges from the whole succession of tests as nearly the perfection of Christian knighthood as that condition is humanly attainable. For though he has failed in minor respects—he accepted and concealed the Green Girdle, he shrank a little at the first descent of the axe—he could not humanly be more nearly the perfect Christian knight than he is; he is human, and human nature (according to Christian doctrine) is imperfect, only perfectible through grace. But Gawain is now sensitively conscious of his human imperfection and, therefore, does not fail in the essential Christian virtue of humility. In this respect the Gawain of our poem—who belongs to 'the noblest fellowship of Christian knights'—differs from the pre-Christian hero. He wears the Green Girdle as a garment of penitence.

Once we begin to realize how closely worked is the art of the poem, how complex the poem is in its significances as a work of art, it should be possible to avoid the error of regarding it simply as a recorded myth, the record of the story of a ritual. 'Myth is the new intellectual fashion', as an American reviewer of some recent books about myth and literature puts it.[21] The recent tendency in criticism, under the influence of anthropology, to interpret a work of art too simply by disinterring its buried myth and leaving it at that, seems to involve an unhappy confusion between myth and art. Unless we can see very exactly the relation between the myth and the art in the case of each individual work of literary art (where there is a myth *there* at all) the 'anthropological approach' to literature becomes only the latest technique for irrelevance. To discuss a poem as though it were a myth is only another way of evading the poem.

The same reviewer helpfully sums up what appear to be the findings, at the stage at present reached, of the Cambridge school of anthropologists who have explored the ritual theory of myth: 'Myth is neither a record of historical fact nor an explanation of nature. It is the spoken correlative of a ritual, the story which the rite enacts or once enacted'. The poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was evidently a very conscious artist, conscious of what he wanted to do and of what he was doing. It seems probable that he

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[20] 'In the final development of the story [the Grail story] the Pathos is shared alike by the representative of the Vegetation Spirit and the Healer, whose task involves a period of stern testing and probation'. (*From Ritual to Romance,* page 104).
The Green Man and Gawain of the First Fit again appear in some respects to have changed places in the last Fit. Gawain withstanding the blow is compared to a 'stubbe' . . . 'That ratheled is in roché grounde with rotes a hundreth'.

[21] Stanley Hyman, *Myth, Ritual and Nonsense* (The Kenyon Review, Summer, 1949).

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had consciously in mind—may have himself witnessed—the ritual the story of which underlies the poem. This underlying ritual and the poet's belief in its value as myth is what gives the poem its life. But it is not what has made the poem—not simply a record of a ritual—a complex work of art. A conscious artist, the poet *begins* from a myth; he *ends* with the poem we have.

The poem—the work of a highly conscious and sophisticated artist—implies also a conscious and sophisticated audience. If we required evidence that there existed in England in the 14th century not only a vivid local life but—in what we regard as a remote locality—a higher degree of *civilization* than exists anywhere, perhaps, in the 20th century we need only point to this poem. Thoroughly *local* as the poem is there is nothing provincial in a limiting sense about it; it is, in the best sense, sophisticated. It implies, as Shakespeare does, a highly refined and complex literary art, which engages at all levels, thus testifying to the existence of a truly integrated public, trained to respond.

The miracle of the poem is indeed that it has so consciously held and made the best of such diverse worlds, composed these without loss of diversity or substance in the very inclusive harmony of a superb work of art—a firmly rooted, multiple branched, gnarled but symmetrical northern oak. It should be as well known to us as Eliot's *Waste Land;* it equally belongs to the great English tradition. Its imagery and symbolism have also underlying affinities that are certainly not accidental with the characteristically Shakespearean.

JOHN SPEIRS.

Note.—The spelling of the quotations has been straightened out only in a few obvious respects. Far be it from me to venture upon what should be undertaken only by those who believe themselves qualified to edit texts. Since one of the conceptions of the *raison d'être* of a School of English Studies that has long been in favour in some universities is that it should turn out whole generations of editors of texts, it is surprising that we have still to await a straight text (as distinct, of course, from a 'translation') of this poem.

One is left wondering what could be the use of translations such as M. R. Ridley's, still less of a translation into Spenserian stanzas which is again in circulation. The poem *is* its own kind of English, if only that were given a fair chance by the editors.

[This is the first of a series of articles by Mr. Speirs revaluing English Mediæval literature.—ED.]

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JAMES'S DEBT TO HAWTHORNE (II)

'THE MARBLE FAUN' and 'THE WINGS OF THE DOVE'

BOTH *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Bostonians* deal with the theme of the American woman, and principally under her aspect of excessive liberation. But the suffragist movement is only a corner of the whole subject, and there are frequent points at which Hawthorne and James draw near in their treatment of the larger problem, reminding one that both novelists were far from remaining in the particular corner, and that they were capable of bestowing a conspicuousness on their American heroines that had little to do with the sensational effects of organized and militant feminism. The problem is ultimately one for sociological exploration, and one recalls that in *The American Scene* (1907) James offered some pages that, precisely *as* sociological exploration, are probably the best thing we shall ever have in that line. It has become the critical fashion to extol the nobilities and spiritual endowments that James lavished on several of his heroines, and the tendency has been to overlook the fact that in most of his best work the endowments, the way he gets them across to the reader, are intrinsically dependent on his recognition of what, for the final picture, is missing from the background and character of the American maiden. We have already seen his incisive touches rectifying the unsatiric vision of Hawthorne; and we have seen how his very mercilessness could animate the character of Verena Tarrant, exhibiting her virtues with a success forever closed to Hawthorne's more tender conception of Priscilla. Hawthorne's suggestiveness in *Blithedale* had been of the most valuable kind; but years later when James wrote *The Wings of the Dove,* Hawthorne's example operated in a different way. James proved less critical, and although the 'influence' in this case was considerably less extensive, such an imprint as the precedent left on James's art was unfortunate in its effect.

But before discussing this later relation, relatively so much more tenuous than the one already considered, one should envisage James's most persistent attitude to his American girls and women as concretely as possible. The following quotation from *The American Scene,* written so late in James's career, may be taken as a kind of axial statement around which it is possible to group most, if not all, of his American heroines. It tickets their satiric content in a manner cutting enough to be, on occasion, cruel, at the same time allowing dancing room for those emergent virtues which, in the case of, say, Daisy Miller or Pandora Day, are the last things we

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keep pathetically in view. The importance of the passage will justify the inclusion of a quotation of such length:

'She has been, accordingly, about the globe, beyond all doubt, a huge success of curiosity; she has at her best—and far beyond any consciousness and intention of her own, lively as these for the most part usually are—infinitely amused the nations. It has been found among them that, for more reasons than we can now go into, her manner of embodying and representing her sex has fairly made of her a new human convenience, not unlike fifty of the others, of a slightly different order, the ingenious mechanical appliances, stoves, refrigerators, sewing-machines, type-writers, cash-registers, that have done so much, in the household and the place of business, for the American name. By which I am, of course, far from meaning that the revelation has been of her utility as a domestic drudge; it has been much rather in the fact that the advantages attached to her being a woman at all have been so happily combined with the absence of the drawbacks, for persons intimately dealing with her, traditionally suggested by that condition. The corresponding advantages, in the light of almost any old order, have always seemed inevitably paid for by the drawbacks; but here, unmistakably, was a case in which—as at first appeared, certainly—they were to be enjoyed very nearly for nothing. What it came to, evidently, was that she had been grown in an air in which a hundred of the "European" complications and dangers didn't exist, and in which also she had had to take upon herself a certain training for freedom. It was not that she had had, in the vulgar sense, to "look out" for herself, inasmuch as it was of the very essence of her position not to be threatened or waylaid; but that she could develop her audacity on the basis of her security, just as she could develop her "powers" in a medium from which criticism was consistently absent. Thus she arrived, full-blown, on the general scene, the least criticized object, in proportion to her importance, that had ever adorned it. It would take long to say why her situation, under this retrospect, may affect the inner fibre of the critic himself as one of the most touching on record; he may merely note his perception that she was to have been after all but the sport of fate. For why need she originally, he wonders, have embraced so confidently, so gleefully, yet so unguardedly, the terms offered her to an end practically so perfidious? Why need she, unless in the interest of her eventual discipline, have turned away with so light a heart after watching the Man, the deep American man, retire into his tent and let down the flap? She had her "paper" from him, their agreement signed and sealed; but would she not, in some other air and under some other sky, have been visited by a saving instinct? Would she not have said "No, this is too unnatural, there must be a trap in it somewhere—it's addressed really, in the long run, to making a fool of me?" It is impossible, of course, to tell; and her case, as it stands for us, at any rate, is that she showed no doubts.'

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It is in the world comprehended within the terms of this quotation that James achieved a classic success with the American female that was beyond Hawthorne's ambition. Hawthorne could exhibit a heavily Dickensian humour at the expense of a matrimonially inclined widow in his short story, *Mrs. Bullfrog,* or show himself genuinely ill-tempered in his crude attacks on the English dowager; but neither the intelligence nor the values that shot through the Jamesian comedy when it dealt with American womanhood was at Hawthorne's disposal. But at another level they had their common ground, for if James, particularly in his late work, can be credited with idealizing the American girl, it was easy enough for him to look back from Milly Theale to a positive apotheosis of New England girlhood that Hawthorne had provided for the general edification many years before. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that he *did* look back, and receive support from the precedent. Mr. Matthiessen has written in *The American Renaissance*: 'The characters who mark his greatest advance beyond anything in Hawthorne's scope, and who are, indeed, the unique signatures of his sensibility, are his heroines, particularly Isabel Archer and Milly Theale.' As far as Milly Theale goes, exactly the opposite of this proposition seems to me to be true. James was most beyond Hawthorne's scope when he was drawing on that critical and satiric consciousness evidenced in the above quotation, and in *The Bostonians* we have seen how astonishingly far beyond Hawthorne's scope, James, on such a theme, could really be. It is precisely in a character like Milly Theale that he draws especially near to his predecessor, and nearest, one must add, to some of his predecessor's sorriest aspects. Again, the importance of recognizing the relation resides partly in gauging the extent of James's participation in a prevailing American attitude; and especially the recognition should help to qualify the large over-estimation, as relative to the other works, which has overtaken *The Wings of the Dove* in recent years.

The Marble Faun was the last completed and artistically finished novel that Hawthorne wrote. Despite the opinion that accords *The Blithedale Romance* that unenviable distinction, it seems to me unmistakably the worst of the four major novels, although James was deeply impressed by it. He wrote that 'some of the finest pages in Hawthorne are to be found in it,' and he thought there was 'a great deal of interest in the simple combination and opposition of the four actors,' a remark that makes one think of *The Golden Bowl.* But before taking up the influence of *The Marble Faun* on James's conception of Milly Theale, I wish to glance at its much earlier effect on one of James's stories, *The Last of the Valerii,* which he had written in 1868. Not only will this suggest how the influence of *The Marble Faun,* making its impression thus early, was granted a remarkably long period of gestation in James's artistic consciousness during which its sown seeds might arrive at *any* maturity—it will reveal most of all how critics have tended to attribute to other writers, generally French, an influence

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which, when distilled to its primal essence, is recognizably, if not blatantly, Hawthorne's. *The Last of the Valerii* is commonly supposed to have resulted from an early translation which James made of Mérimée's story *La Venus d'Ille*. The two stories have plots that present, in large measure, parallel constructions. In both of them, pagan statues of goddesses are disinterred on estates belonging to persons in the respective stories, and in both cases the goddesses interfere in the marriages of the two heroes—the interference being supernatural in Mérimée's story, psychological in James's. The resemblance ends here, but it is enough to have persuaded most critics that James took the story over from Mérimée, although several have remarked (Matthiessen among them) on a Hawthornian overtone. But it is precisely that Hawthornian element that is the significant thing in the story, and without which *The Last of the Valerii* would be a piece of lifeless clap-trap. Conte Valerio derives from the pagan-Christian Donatello of *The Marble Faun*. Just as Donatello resembles the Faun of Praxiteles, Conte Valerio 'had a head and throat like some of the busts in the Vatican,' and: 'I more than once smiled at her [Martha, Valerio's wife's] archæological zeal, declaring that I believed she had married the Count because he was like a statue of the Decadence.' The young heroine Martha, who is characterized by 'dove-like glances,' is described, interestingly enough in view of James's later course, as 'a young American girl who had the air and almost the habits of a princess.' There are many points of resemblance between the two stories as far as plot goes (Donatello, it may be remembered, a little irrelevantly discovers an antique statue of a beautiful goddess in one of the later chapters of *The Marble Faun*), and particularly there is a similarity in the descriptive passages (Hawthorne's and James's scenes in the Pantheon, for example, should be compared); but I do not wish to emphasize this sort of thing. Where the two stories come very close and very significantly together is in the moral tone—the simultaneous love and fear of the past which was so characteristic of both men, and which, in them, is a peculiarly American note. Much later in this study of Hawthorne and James it will be necessary to examine this attitude with some care, but at this point I can only quote a passage from *The Last of the Valerii* which is perfect Hawthorne, and by no means imperfect James. Mérimée's story is a piece of artificial cleverness, but James's story is a subtle—if still rather young—analysis of the conflict between the past and the present when the sense and weight of tradition and history are unworkably heavy. If the reader is inclined to think that James's view seems very simple here, I do not think the meaning of *The Sense of the Past*, written in James's full maturity, will, in its ultimate distilment reveal anything more complex. This is the passage:

> 'The poor Count became, to my imagination, a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which history had implanted in his line. No wonder he was foredoomed to be cruel. Was not

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cruelty a tradition of his race, and crime an example? The unholy passions of his forefathers revived, incurably, in his untaught nature and clamoured dumbly for an issue. What a heavy heritage it seemed to me, as I reckoned it up in my melancholy musings, the Count's interminable ancestry! Back to the profligate revival of arts and vices—back to the bloody medley of mediæval wars—back through the long, fitfully glaring dusk of the early ages to its ponderous origin in the solid Roman state—back through all the darkness of history it stretched itself, losing every claim on my sympathies as it went. Such a record was in itself a curse . . .'

The Last of the Valerii shares its central moral meaning with Hawthorne, and its indebtedness to him is at the very centre of its life. In making the point at such length I have wished primarily to afford relief against any possible shock in my initial assertion that the most forceful influence shaping James's conception of Milly Theale's character and function came from *The Marble Faun*. Demonstrably it had been a profound influence on a characteristic Jamesian story written when he was only twenty-five, and the influence was not of the kind that ended when the story was finished.

The impression it made was deepest in the case of one of the characters, the little New England copyist, Hilda. James is very explicit in his *Life of Hawthorne* as to the extent to which he responded:

'The character of Hilda has always struck me as an admirable invention—one of those things that mark the man of genius. It needed a man of genius and of Hawthorne's imaginative delicacy, to feel the propriety of such a figure as Hilda, and to perceive the relief it would both give and borrow. This pure and somewhat rigid New England girl, following the vocation of a copyist of pictures in Rome, unacquainted with evil and untouched by impurity, has been accidentally the witness, unknown and unsuspected, of the dark deed by which her friends, Miriam and Donatello, are knit together. This is her revelation of evil, her loss of perfect innocence. She has done no wrong, and yet wrong-doing has become a part of her experience, and she carries the weight of her detested knowledge upon her heart. She carries it a long time, saddened and oppressed by it, till at last she can bear it no longer. If I have called the whole idea of the presence and effect of Hilda in the story a trait of genius, the purest touch of inspiration is the episode in which the poor girl deposits her burden. She has passed the whole lonely summer in Rome; and one day, at the end of it, finding herself in St. Peter's, she enters a confessional, strenuous daughter of the Puritans as she is, and pours out her dark knowledge into the bosom of the Church—then comes away with her conscience lightened, not a whit less Puritan than before. If the book contained nothing else noteworthy but this admirable scene, and the pages describing the

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murder committed by Donatello under Miriam's eyes, and the ecstatic wandering, afterwards, of the guilty couple through the "blood-stained streets of Rome", it would still deserve to rank high among the imaginative productions of our day.'

In view of this expressed admiration for Hilda, the close similarity between the symbolism with which James presents Milly and that with which Hawthorne presents Hilda acquires genuine significance inasmuch as this symbolism carries implicit moral values that shed nearly identical lustres over the two girls. It is odd that this similarity has not been remarked, particularly by Mr. Matthiessen; but Milly Theale has no more ardent admirer among contemporary critics than he, whereas he is very justly repelled by Hilda, seeing her as a self-righteous and impossible prig who affords 'an ugly glimpse of American spiritual life, as it was destined increasingly to become in the decades after the Civil War.' It may not be astonishing then that he has failed to note the likeness, for Milly is a far more attractive girl than Hilda. Nevertheless she is a direct descendant in the moral line, although by the time her generation has been reached the Puritanism has become civilized beyond easy recognition. In his later book, *Henry James: The Major Phase,* Mr. Matthiessen maintained that James, 'did not, like Mallarmé, start with his symbol. He reached it only with the final development of his theme, and then used it essentially in the older tradition of the poetic metaphor, to give concretion, as well as allusive and beautiful extension of his thought.' I do not wish to discuss the nature of James's symbolism here,[1] but the following passage from *The Marble Faun* looks forward so directly towards

[1]Frankly, I doubt if it is a discussable problem in the terms Mr. Matthiessen uses here. There is a good deal of evidence that some of James's symbols had been in his mind for years before he used them, and if this is so there is no reason why such an image may not have planted the little acorn to which James was so fond of referring. F. R. Leavis has pointed, in *The Great Tradition,* to an anticipation of one of James's most important symbols that seems to contradict Mr. Matthiessen's description of his method of composing. In *The Portrait of a Lady* Madame Merle's concern for her rare porcelain coffee cup looks directly ahead to the central symbol in *The Golden Bowl.* Although Mr. Leavis does not quote the passage in his text, it is important enough in the present argument to be reproduced here:

' "I think you're very simple." And Madame Merle kept her eye on her cup. "I've come to think that with time. I judged you, as I say, of old; but it's only since your marriage that I've understood you. I've seen better what you have been to your wife than I ever saw what you were for me. Please be very careful of that precious object."

' "It already has a wee bit of a tiny crack," said Osmund dryly as he put it down.'

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the central image of *The Wings of the Dove* that one cannot accept the resemblances as wholly coincidental:

> 'Here she dwelt, in her tower, possessing a friend or two in Rome, but no home companion except the flock of doves, whose cote was in a ruinous chamber contiguous to her own. They soon became as familiar with the fair-haired Saxon girl as if she were a born sister of their brood; and her customary white robe bore such an analogy to their snowy plumage that the confraternity of artists called Hilda the Dove, and recognized her aerial apartment as the Dove-cote. And while the other doves flew far and wide in quest of what was good for them, Hilda likewise spread her wings, and sought such ethereal and imaginative sustenance as God ordains for creatures of her kind.'

It is even possible that the title of James's novel was suggested by his memory of one of the phrases above. The image of Hilda the Dove is not, it should be said at once, a random image which Hawthorne has applied in one paragraph and dropped. It is the persistent metaphor, the definitive symbol that occurs everywhere Hilda is discussed. It is in terms of this image that those qualities which James isolated in Hilda for particular praise—her purity and 'perfect innocence'—may be said to exist; and I cannot believe, after the hearty congratulation we have seen James offering Hawthorne for Hilda's character, that the metaphor which is the very essence of it should have failed to leave its mark on James's conscious memory. It is extremely difficult to guess from the *Notebooks* and the 'Preface' to *The Wings* just what the real history of the inception of that novel really was. Remembering that James had begun his 'Preface' by saying that '*The Wings of the Dove,* published in 1902, represents to my memory a very old —if I shouldn't perhaps rather say a very young—motive . . .', Mr. Matthiessen (among others) has urged that James had his young cousin, Minny Temple, who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four, in mind when he conceived Milly Theale. This is almost certainly true, but the mere desire, persisting over so many years, to commemorate his early friend, was as likely to introduce a note of forcing into the conception of Milly as it was to create, in Matthiessen's words, 'the most resonant symbol for what he had to say about humanity.' Certainly it embarrassed James when he came to apply those satiric touches by which so many of his earlier young women had been endowed with life. And yet if one goes back to the long quotation above in which James offered his critical analysis of the American woman, and if one compares item by item with what Milly offers, the similarities are striking. For example, it is as a 'new human convenience' that Milly makes her debut at Lord Mark's:

> 'The lingering eyes looked her over, the lingering eyes were what went, in almost confessed simplicity, with the pointless "I say, Mark"; and what was really most sensible of all was that, as

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a pleasant matter of course, if she didn't mind, he seemed to suggest their letting people, poor dear things, have the benefit of her.'

And she is no less 'a huge success of curiosity':

'It was so little her fault, this oddity of what had "gone round" about her, that to accept it without question might be as good a way as another feeling of life. It was inevitable to supply the probable description—that of the awfully rich young American who was so queer to behold, but nice, by all accounts, to know; and she had really but one instant of speculation as to fables or fantasies perchance originally launched.'

Such passages could be multiplied, and they show that Milly is pre-eminently a legitimate subject for James's usual observations on the American girl—the kind of observation for which his genius was peculiarly suited—but for whatever reason of his own, James withdrew the usual satiric penalties attaching to such insights, and wishing to spare her, he left her instead the victim of his indulgence. In his earlier work these satiric insights had penetrated to the centre and created the substance of his young women, establishing the richness of their reality; but inasmuch as he was commemorating Minny Temple he would not leave the Dove exposed, nor violate the sentimental memory. And yet so ingrained was the habit that he had to take deliberate precautions. There is an uneasy and uncertain note (which the technical concern so elaborately insisted on in the 'Preface' only nominally explains) when he says, speaking in his own voice in the novel itself: 'She worked—and seemingly quite without design—upon the sympathy, the curiosity, the fancy of her associates, and we shall really ourselves scarce otherwise come closer to her than by feeling their impression and sharing, if need be, their confusion'. This uncertainty sometimes reveals itself in a significant unsteadiness of image of which James himself is conscious:

'It was her nature, once for all—a nature that reminded Mrs. Stringham of the term always used in the newspapers about the great new steamers, the inordinate number of "feet of water" they drew; so that if, in your little boat, you had chosen to hover and approach, you had but yourself to thank, when once motion was started, for the way the draught pulled you. Milly drew the feet of water, and odd though it might seem that a lonely girl, who was not robust and who hated sound and show, should stir the stream like a leviathan, her companion floated off with the sense of rocking violently at her side.'

James, of course, likes to build Milly's metaphors on a grand scale ('When Milly smiled it was a public event—when she didn't it was a chapter of history'), but James is quite right about this image: it does seem odd. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, with a far greater sense of proportion and fitness, James had developed the

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elements of this metaphor just far enough: 'Madame Merle meanwhile, as lady in waiting to a princess circulating *incognita,* panted a little in her rear.' Both Isabel and Madame Merle emerge respectably from this description. But in the above image from *The Wings* it is clear what has happened: tugging at the satiric leash in spite of himself, and with no solid grasp of Milly to hold him back, James has given her a metaphor completely inappropriate to her because he cannot resist the urge to set Susan Stringham, with whom he is more secure, in her proper and ludicrous glory. But it is Milly who looks more ludicrous—as ludicrous, but not nearly as effective, as that 'truly massive young person' Rosanna Gaw in *The Ivory Tower,* who simultaneously resembles a Burmese palanquin and 'a ship held back from speed yet with its own canvas expanded'. If I seem to make a good deal of the point here, it is because James's slip exhibits so woefully the way he *doesn't* have hold of Milly. It is not really a small thing, and it is an error that he could not conceivably have made with Isabel Archer or little Maisie Farrange or Verena Tarrant. Somewhat later in the novel, when he is dealing, not with Milly but with Aunt Maud, he can bring off a somewhat similar metaphor with his customary success: 'Mrs. Lowder, it was true, steering in the other quarter a course in which she called at subjects as if they were islets in an archipelago, continued to allow them their ease . . .'

And James has a good deal of trouble with Milly's conversation, for none of his heroines are quite as lacking in animation or wit. James seems almost apologetic for having conferred those qualities in greater abundance on Mrs. Lowder, but nevertheless James is never able to make Milly say anything more clever than her 'weak joke' in the following passage: Mrs. Lowder is speaking first:

> ' "God has been good to one—positively; for I couldn't, at my age, have made a new friend—undertaken, I mean, out of the whole cloth, the real thing. It's like changing one's bankers—after fifty: one doesn't do that. That's why Susie has been kept for me, as you seem to keep people in your wonderful country, in lavender and pink paper—coming back at last as out of a fairy tale and with you as an attendant fairy." Milly hereupon replied appreciatively that such a description of herself made her feel as if pink paper were her dress and lavender its trimming; but Aunt Maud was not to be deterred by a weak joke from keeping it up.'

Milly's witticism sounds a little like Catherine Sloper, but one may, for the measure of distance between the two novels, compare the reality and significant meaning one senses behind Catherine's little patheticisms with the uninteresting, dull inertness of Milly's response.

There is not space here to accumulate instances of the imperfect artistic realization which James brings to Milly, but one's impression of the kind of unsteadiness noted above is enforced, at quite a different level of imagery, by the elaborate 'art' metaphors

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by which James seeks to define his subtleties. The most important of them is perhaps too long to quote. It is that attempt to describe the relationship between Milly and Kate Croy by placing them, as it were, in a twilight scene from a Maeterlinck play. The passage, which is the most 'purple' one James must ever have written, is in Chapter XXIV, and the reader who wishes to see how near, on occasion, James could draw to Pater and Arthur Symonds, may turn to it there. In the days when James had dealt with his heroines directly, heroines with whom he felt satirically, critically free (having no personal reasons to feel otherwise), this sort of metaphor would hardly have achieved his purposes, for it leaves James in the end very much where he was when he took it up: on the outside. But James instinctively knew that his apotheosized, his 'royal' Milly was, at centre, just another 'exposed maiden', like the others he had written about, and for the sake of maintaining the difference he dared not penetrate deeper into the human substance than such a *fin de siècle* picture allowed.

Faced, then, with such difficulties, the hints that he found in *The Marble Faun* on how to canonize an American girl in a novel must surely have been welcome. Once Milly is deprived of her gilding and courtesy titles of royalty the moral quantity she represents in such an unquestioned way begins to merge at once with that represented by Hilda. It is interesting to note that both novelists applied this moral coating quite deliberately from the outside, setting the girls against suggestive backgrounds, and decorating them with symbols of universally acknowledged value. Here is the process going on in Hawthorne. Miriam is on her way to visit Hilda in her tower studio:

> 'Miriam passed beneath the deep portal of the palace, and turning to the left, began to mount flight after flight of a staircase, which for the loftiness of its aspiration, was worthy to be Jacob's ladder, or, at all events, the staircase of the Tower of Babel. The city bustle, which is heard even in Rome, the rumble of wheels over the uncomfortable paving-stones, the harsh cries reëchoing in the high and narrow streets, grew faint and died away; as the turmoil of the world will always die, if we set our faces to climb heavenward. Higher, and higher still; and now, glancing through the successive windows that threw in their narrow light upon the stairs, her view stretched across the roofs of the city, unimpeded even by the stateliest palaces. Only the domes of the churches ascend into this airy region, and hold up their golden crosses on a level with her eye; except, that, out of the very heart of Rome, the column of Antoninus thrusts itself upward, with St. Paul upon its summit, the sole human form that seems to have kept her company'.

Jacob's ladder, the Tower of Babel, heaven-aspiring staircases, church domes and their crosses, and a statue of St. Paul, are all introduced simply for the purpose of shedding their radiance on Hilda. That there can be no mistake about the application,

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Hawthorne makes Miriam say to Hilda almost immediately after the above paragraph: 'You breathe sweet air, above all the evil scents of Rome, and even so, in your maiden elevation, you dwell above our vanities and passions, our moral dust and mud, with the doves and the angels for your nearest neighbors. I should not wonder if the Catholics were to make a saint of you, like your namesake of old . . .' Of course the 'elevation' is significant, lifting Hilda above commonness, just as it does Milly in her Venetian palace in the following passage:

> 'The romance for her, yet once more, would be to sit there for ever, through all her time, as in a fortress; and the idea became an image of never going down, of remaining aloft in the divine, dustless air, where she would hear but the plash of water against stone. The great floor on which they moved was at an altitude, and this prompted the rueful fancy. "Ah, not to go down—never, never to go down!" she strangely sighed to her friend.
>
> '"But why shouldn't you," he asked, "with that tremendous old staircase in your court? There ought of course always to be people at top and bottom, in Veronese costumes, to watch you do it" '

James's Dove, carrying as she does the title of 'heiress of all the ages', benefits by the reference to the Veronese costumes in the same way that Hawthorne's Dove benefits by the numerous references to religious objects surrounding her studio, and by so many people calling her a Catholic saint. Apart from the central Dove symbol, which becomes a structural device in both novels, and apart from the manner in which the novelists build up their heroines from the outside, there are other fainter echoes of Hawthorne in *The Wings*. In view of James's great admiration for the scene in which Hilda confesses herself in St. Peter's, Milly's speech to Kate Croy on leaving Sir Luke Strett's office after her first interview seems particularly pointed: 'I feel—I can't otherwise describe it—as if I had been, on my knees, to the priest. I've confessed and I've been absolved. It has been lifted off'. A more evasive, but larger and more important resemblance, exists in the situations of the two girls themselves—the similarity of their natures being revealed under the pressure of a moral affliction not their own. Both Hilda and Milly are incorruptibly pure—indeed, positively purifying in their effect on others. (Hilda 'purified the objects of her regard by the mere act of turning such spotless eyes on them'; while Milly, as Kate Croy affirms in the end, has taken both Densher and herself under her wings, and Densher at least is sanctified by that token.) Hilda loses her innocence by proxy, as it were, when she sees her friends commit a crime; and while James is never quite clear as to how much Milly has guessed about the extent of Kate's treachery, the presumption may safely be that she has guessed literally *everything*. At any rate, it kills her, just as Hilda's knowledge of Miriam's guilt induces a psychological crisis

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of the utmost gravity. Both the Doves are personally stainless, but the guilt of others is unbearable to them; they are both incapable of submitting to the profane touch of the world, or of taking the shock of another's evil. If one now glances back at James's comments on Hilda's character which were quoted earlier it becomes increasingly difficult not to suppose that James's attitude towards Milly must surely have found its reassuring and natively American precedent in *The Marble Faun*: for if Minny Temple is the ultimate source of Milly Theale, Hawthorne's Dove yet seems to have been the only and the perfect artistic model, the fictional prototype.

There are other points of approach as well. The extent to which James took over Hawthorne's device of endowing ancient portraits with extraordinary resemblances to the living has been frequently enough noted by other critics. There are no less than four distinct resemblances of this nature remarked on in *The Marble Faun*, and they are introduced to ends not unlike that which James had in view when Lord Mark shows Milly the Bronzino which her own features resemble. But the only value of items like this is that they understudy the central and important relation that exists between the Doves. To sum up the traits which these two have in common, one would say that the siniessness of them both is emphasized. They are angels pure and simple. In Milly's case this aspect is minimized, not only because the fashion had changed considerably, but because James wished to show her off as primarily the culminating point of the past, 'the heiress of all the ages'. Whatever else his intention was in doing this, it is obvious that such a conception would reduce the tension in that ambivalent attitude to the past which James shared with Hawthorne. In Milly's gold-filled, American, de-verminizing hands the past might, after all, be soaped and combed into acceptability. Some similar idea must have been gnawing in Hawthorne's thought, for Hilda, the expert little copyist, is an heiress of all the ages in no mean fashion herself:

> 'If a picture had darkened into an indistinct shadow through time and neglect, or had been injured by cleaning, or retouched by some profane hand, she seemed to possess the faculty of seeing it in its pristine glory. The copy would come from her hands with what the beholder felt must be the light which the old master had left upon the original in bestowing his final and most etherial touch. In some instances even (at least, so those believed who most appreciated Hilda's power and sensibility) she had been enabled to execute what the old master had conceived in his imagination, but had not so perfectly succeeded in putting upon canvas; a result surely not impossible when such depth of sympathy as she possessed was assisted by the delicate skill and accuracy of her slender hand. In such cases the girl was but the finer instrument, a more exquisitely effective piece of mechanism, by the help of which the spirit of some great departed painter now first achieved his ideal, centuries after his own earthly hand, that other tool, had turned to dust'.

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Obviously both the girls are out to improve the past, but in comparison with Milly's regal ability to buy it up, this mode of recapture seems comparatively subtle. Point by point the notes arrange themselves, and in the end the attributes of the Doves total up to very nearly the same figure. Milly's 'Princess' equates with Hilda's 'Saint', and both girls have a treasure of gilt-edged metaphors deposited in their names enabling them to draw lavishly on dividends that neither one of them has done much to earn in her respective novel. It would seem that James had been 'taken in' by Hilda in a way he hadn't been 'taken in' by Priscilla and Zenobia when he wrote *The Bostonians*, and that the earlier James was capable of profiting in a sharper manner from Hawthorne's art than was the case later on.

I have emphasized the relation between Milly Theale and Minny Temple up to now because it seemed to personalize James's conception of Milly's character in a critically pertinent way. Such commemorative intentions on the part of a writer are frequently inhibiting, and something very similar may have contributed in Hawthorne's case to the failure of Hilda. We know that Hawthorne was in the habit of addressing Mrs. Hawthorne, in his letters to her, as his 'Dove', and the particular kind of moral effulgence that adorns Hilda is the sort of thing against which one must be braced constantly in Mrs. Hawthorne's letters. But Milly has to be viewed in a deeper perspective than this, and I bear in mind the analysis of her character and function that Mr. Quentin Anderson has offered in his extraordinary and valuable essay, 'Henry James and the New Jerusalem'.[2] It will be recalled that Mr. Anderson, examining the relation between the novels of James and his father's psychology and theology, discovered in the son's work, and particularly in the three late novels, a symbolic presentation of the elder James's doctrines—and to such an extent that these novels show in something of the fashion of fictionalized moralities. From the viewpoint of James's intention Mr. Anderson can be extremely convincing, and not least so in his analysis of *The Wings of the Dove* where Milly, the American girl, is shown to be the 'representative of divine love', redeeming mankind in the person of Merton Densher from the constrictive and appropriative love which is an inversion of the Divinity immanent in men. The rescue is effected in terms of the perfect selflessness of Milly's love, as contrasted with the acquisitive instincts on which Kate Croy's love, which is merely the love of phenomenal appearances, is based. Perhaps I owe Mr. Anderson an apology for so brutalizing his meaning in this thumbnail paraphrase of a fragment of his total argument, but he has spoken for himself in the pages of this quarterly, and therefore most *Scrutiny* readers will already be familiar with the force of his case. Accepting this interpretation as more or less correct insofar as the meaning of *The Wings of the Dove* goes, what I wish to suggest is that the novelist capable of building such a construct would almost inevitably have found a

[2] *The Kenyon Review*, Autumn, 1946.

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treasure of suggestiveness in *The Marble Faun*. Although it will necessitate something like a recapitulation of points already made, I should like to consider here the relation between Hilda and Milly from the point of view of Mr. Anderson's analysis of *The Wings*. To do so has the double effect, for me at any rate, of adding its own note of persuasion to an already highly convincing case—there was, I conclude, the incipience of something just this outlandish long hanging in the American air—and it helps to reveal a weakness in Milly, an inherited taint, that was something more than a matter of blood or lungs.

The Marble Faun is unmistakably, but a little awkwardly, an allegory on the Fall of Man. Donatello, allegedly the descendant of a faun who, in some antique and guiltless age is said to have fallen in love with a daughter of the Monte Beni family and founded a line, appears to have inherited not only some of the physical characteristics of his remote ancestor, but also the profound Golden Age innocence of the founding faun. He falls in love with Miriam, a member of the Roman art colony, a beautiful girl who bears some secret guilt with her. It is important to note that Miriam is wholly a European product, with high family connections in the Papal government hinted at. The nature of her crime is carefully concealed, but it is clearly part of the texture of the institutionalized and crumbling un-American past that Hawthorne could not help being troubled by. This fact is made unmistakably clear when Miriam's partner in crime (the nature of which Hawthorne prudishly conceals) is revealed to have been a Capuchin monk. Hawthorne obviously chose the Capuchins because of the famous cemetery of the Cappuccini in Rome where the skeletons of the decomposed friars are on view—a setting that gave him an opportunity to be as explicit as a New Englander could wish about what he thought of the bones of the past. Miriam uses Donatello's love for her to involve him in her own guilt, and from that moment he loses his original innocence and enters a life of endless penance. Now the action and tragedy is centred in these two Europeans, but on the outskirts of that action we have the two Americans, Kenyon the sculptor and Hilda the copyist, keenly aware of the good vibrations from the past, especially as these are transmissible through art objects, but immune to any of those malign influences that have corrupted Miriam and Donatello. Hilda's function is to act as a kind of symbol of absolute good—so absolute, in fact, that she is essentially out of relation with any of the 'fallen' characters except insofar as the very rational Kenyon is able to make an occasional practical application of her highfalutin' morality to the lowly estate of the merely human characters in the story. I say 'merely human' with a sense of how more-than-human Hawthorne seems to wish Hilda, for the final and cumulative effect, to appear. She differs from Miriam not so much in not having fallen, but most radically in her practical inability to fall. Kenyon, for example, says of Hilda:

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'"Her womanhood is of the etherial type, and incompatible with any shadow of darkness or evil".

'"You are right," rejoined Miriam; "there are women of that etherial type as you term it, and Hilda is one of them. She would die of her first wrong-doing—supposing for a moment that she could be capable of doing wrong"'.

Read in the full context of the novel, which is literally overgrown with similar lush specimens, such compliments cannot be interpreted as figurative. In the end the intention seems to be that they should literally apply; and though for convention's sake Hilda is content to allow that she is only, even weakly, human, she never seems wholly convinced of the fact. On her first meeting with Miriam after learning of the latter's guilt, she immediately rejects her friendship in these terms:

'If I were one of God's angels, with a nature incapable of stain, and garments that never could be spotted, I would keep ever at your side, and try to lead you upward. But I am a poor, lonely girl, whom God has set here in an evil world, and given her only a white robe, and bid her wear it back to Him, as white as when she put it on. Your powerful magnetism would be too much for me. The pure, white atmosphere, in which I try to discern what things are good and true, would be discolored. And, therefore, Miriam, before it is too late, I mean to put faith in this awful heart-quake, which warns me henceforth to avoid you'.

Miriam greedily seizes this occasion for again asserting her belief in Hilda's super-human virtue: 'You have no sin, nor any conception of what it is; and therefore you are so terribly severe! As an angel you are not amiss; but as a human creature, and a woman among earthly men and women, you need a sin to soften you'. Hilda shows her willingness to accept this evaluation of herself, and describes the only kind of universe she would find tolerable:

'"While there is a single guilty person in the universe, each innocent one must feel his innocence tortured by that guilt. Your deed, Miriam, has darkened the whole sky!"

'Poor Hilda turned from her unhappy friend, and, sinking on her knees in a corner of the chamber, could not be prevailed upon to utter another word. And Miriam, with a long regard from the threshold, bade farewell to this doves' nest, this one little nook of pure thoughts and innocent enthusiasms, into which she had brought such trouble. Every crime destroys more Edens than our own'.

I have said that the masculine counterpart of Hilda is the American, Kenyon. He participates in the same exalted sentiments, but being 'practical' he can communicate them to the Europeans in a way that is denied to the more exquisite and etherial American Dove. Knowing that Donatello and Miriam are

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both involved in the same guilt, he suggests a union to them for the sake of mutual encouragement in penance. His manner of speech relates him to Hilda very closely:

> ' "Not for earthly bliss, therefore", said Kenyon, "but for mutual elevation, and encouragement towards a severe and painful life, you take each other's hands. And if out of toil, sacrifice, prayer, penitence, and earnest effort towards right things, there comes, at length, a sombre and thoughtful happiness, taste it, and thank Heaven!" '

But Kenyon is not the incorruptible fountain of grace that Hilda is. He is capable of asking, 'Did Adam fall that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his?' The impeccable Hilda, whose moral theology is unerring, replies:

> 'Oh, hush! . . . This is terrible; and I could weep for you, if you indeed believe it. Do not you perceive what a mockery your creed makes, not only of all religious sentiments, but of moral law? and how it annuls and obliterates whatever precepts of Heaven are written deepest within us? You have shocked me beyond words!'

After this he can only propose marriage, seeing in such a union an unbeatable team:

> '. . . the mind wanders wild and wide; and, so lonely as I live and work, I have neither pole-star above nor light of cottage windows here below, to bring me home. Were you my guide, my counsellor, my inmost friend, with that white wisdom which clothes you as a celestial garment, all would go well. O Hilda, guide me home!'

'Home' to such a pair as this can only mean America, and they postpone their return no longer, for Hawthorne has made it clear all along that their moral tone and achievement has its specific national origin, and can only be permanently sustained in the pure New England air.

I have offered these quotations because they illustrate the extent to which the aura of exaltedness that surrounds Hilda is not meant to be one simply of atmosphere or effect, but is meant to cut out a solid moral reality. Naturally, on such a showing Hilda is a dismal failure artistically. The moral reality that she is supposed to embody, although fuzzily conceived, is clearly enough stated to reveal its radical falseness. It has no counterpart in reality. It is as impossible in the world of imagination as it is in life. By the time Hawthorne got around to creating Hilda he was irrevocably ruined as an artist. And yet we have James's own words describing the intensity of his admiration. It was Hilda that he particularly liked.

Assuming that Mr. Anderson's analysis of *The Wings of the Dove* is essentially correct, it is easy to see what James must have

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discovered—or thought he discovered—in Hawthorne's novel, even as early as the *Life* of 1879. The guilt of the past, so largely European, is revealed in all its musty squalor by the contrasting purity of a young girl who, being an American, has no part in that heritage of crime and misery that belongs to the Old World. This girl is a 'saint' (we have everybody's word for it) who purifies by her mere presence. Hawthorne erred, of course, by making her apotheosis so complete that no one except Kenyon, who obviously doesn't need it, can rise to the rarefied levels where her regenerative influence might be effective. But the sanctifying force that is implicit in the Dove image is to be taken just as seriously in Hilda's case as it is in Milly's. She has a mystic sympathy with everything good in the past, particularly when this good is communicable through art objects, but she is so sensitive to evil that the mere presence of a guilty person in the universe is terrible torture to her. The reason of her existence seems to be to set an impossible example in moral perfection unattainable by ordinary and non-American mortals. Everybody defers to Hilda in the same way that everybody defers to Milly, and if James is extremely diffident about approaching Milly except by indirection, we can be grateful to Hawthorne for revealing something of what James might have seen if he had ever got around to giving Milly a straight, hard look. It wasn't, one can't help suspecting, altogether a matter of technical preoccupation that made James deem it wise to cultivate the oblique glance in Milly's direction. Unlike Hilda, Milly is certainly not repulsive, although she takes other people's exaggerated opinions of her worth with irritating complacency. She has, at any rate, a civilized manner. But the girls are sisters under the symbol, and it is a symbol that fails to convince one that its value is valid in either novel. James beautifully refurbished its feathers for a far better showing than it had had in *The Marble Faun* (parts of *The Wings*—those parts that don't deal with Milly —are among James's finest work), but it still remained a little stuffed Dove that 'the restless analyst' had more or less filched from Hawthorne's effects, and it was nothing less than cruel in James to expect a bird like that, instead of a sprig, to carry in its delicate beak the tremendous cedar of meaning that Mr. Anderson has revealed to us.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

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ON THE TRAGEDY OF ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

MR. DANBY'S essay on *Antony and Cleopatra*, printed in the last number of this journal, was refreshing. I had for a long time felt that most criticism seriously distorts the play: even critics who as a rule are far enough from finding in Shakespeare an exalted reflection of their own notions, who show in fact that they are capable of responding to Shakespeare's clear-sighted moral realism, seem unable to resist the temptation to romanticize this play. Mr. Danby, to my mind, corrected a firmly established misreading. If, following in his footsteps, I offer some further comments, it is not because of any disagreement with the general tenour of his essay, so far as I understand it, but because it seems to me that the tragedy is more clearly defined than appears in his account. I cannot in fact make clear to myself what he intends by 'the reality behind the play'; the metaphysical conclusions in terms of a Shakespearean dialectic of contraries elude my grasp; and I find myself wanting to express my sense of the play's sharper and more definite impact on the mind. Anyone who bothers to read both accounts will see that a substantial measure of agreement with Mr. Danby is implied in my own.

The central theme of *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* is the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra. That relationship is evoked and defined with a variety of resources that has behind it almost the whole of Shakespeare's working lifetime. Different and apparently irreconcilable evaluations are explicit in commentary and implicit in direct speech and action: as we move from point to point in the play our sympathy changes direction, and as a result of recurrent shifts of the emotional current, 'judgment' becomes more complex. No single statement that we are given concerning the central love-relationship or the individual lovers can be taken as summing up what the play as a whole has to offer, and it is a task of no little difficulty (though not, for the reader of Shakespeare, an unfamiliar one) to expose oneself to the whole experience rather than to some selected part of it. Now it is a significant fact that those who most glorify the passion of the lovers draw largely on the great speeches of Cleopatra just before her death. And although it may be argued that these great utterances represent a culmination or transcendence of what has gone before, the impression I always receive is that the part has been taken for the whole, and the total meaning thereby obscured. If we are to understand these last scenes fully, and with them the nature and meaning of the whole tragedy, we must read them with a present consciousness of *all* that has preceded them.

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Those who see the play as a triumphant assertion of the positive value of the love of Antony and Cleopatra speak of the energy expressing itself in and through that passion. Middleton Murry, invoking Blake, sees the play in terms of a conflict between Reason and Energy; and D. A. Traversi speaks of 'the transcendent justification of passion in terms of emotional value and vitality.' 'Vitality,' of course, in dealing with this play, is a word one can hardly avoid. But even though one readily agrees that any kind of vitality in love at once establishes a qualitative difference from the mean and indistinct fantasyings of lust, there are further important distinctions to be made. From the very opening of the play we have been made aware of something practised in the coquetry, the retreats, skirmishes, and encounters. In the great central scenes—with a deliberate avoidance of glamour—the dramatist seems insistently to demand that we question ourselves about the nature and conditions of the energy which the lovers release in each other.

The sequence of scenes between Actium and the final defeat of Antony[1] opens, as Granville Barker remarked, with a suggestion of dry and brittle comedy. In an apparent abeyance of feeling the lovers are more or less pushed into each other's arms by their respective followers; and there is something of inert resignation ('Love, I am full of lead. Some wine, within there . . .') in the reconciliation that follows. Feeling does not well up in Antony until he discovers Cæsar's messenger kissing Cleopatra's hand. It is a perverse violence of cruelty—'Whip him, fellow, Till, like a boy, you see him cringe his face'—that goads him into a semblance of energy; and it is in the backwash of this emotion that Cleopatra can humour him until she is, as it were, again present to him. Shakespeare, however, leaves us in no doubt about the overwraught nature of Antony's feelings. The resolution that issues from the reconciliation

> —I will be treble-sinew'd, hearted, breathed,
> And fight maliciously—

is in much the same key as his earlier angry ranting,—

> O that I were
> Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar
> The horned herd!

Now, according to Cleopatra, 'my lord is Antony again'; but the very look of him is given us by Enobarbus—'Now he'll outstare the lightning.'

Antony, in short, is galvanized into feeling; there is no true access of life and energy. And the significance of this is that we know that what we have to do with is an emphatic variation of a familiar pattern. Looking back, we can recall how often this love has seemed to thrive on emotional stimulants. They were necessary

[1]Act III, scene xi to Act IV, scene xii, in the Arden edition: they have never, I think, had critical justice done them.

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for much the same reason as the feasts and wine.[2] For the continued references to feasting—and it is not only Cæsar and his dry Romans who emphasize the Alexandrian consumption of food and drink—are not simply a means of intensifying the imagery of tasting and savouring that is a constant accompaniment of the love theme. They serve to bring out the element of repetition and monotony in a passion which, centring on itself, is self-consuming, leading ultimately to what Antony himself, in a most pregnant phrase, names as 'the heart of loss'. Indeed, the speech in which this phrase occurs (IV, xii) is one of the pivotal things in the play. In its evocation of an appalled sense of insubstantiality it ranks with Macbeth's,

> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is,
> But what is not.

With this difference: that whereas Macbeth is, as it were, reaching forward to a region 'where nothing is but what is not', Antony is driven to recognize the element of unreality and enchantment in what he had thought was solid and enduring. The speech has a superb sensuous reality that is simultaneously felt as discandying or melting, until the curious flicker of the double vision—both intensified and explained by the recurrent theme of 'Egyptian' magic and gipsy-like double-dealing—is resolved in the naked vision:

> Betray'd I am:
> O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,—
> Whose eye beck'd forth my wars, and call'd them home;
> Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,—
> Like a right gipsy, hath, at fast and loose,
> Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.

Unless we are intoxicated by what is said about Cleopatra by her admirers, notably by Enobarbus, this seems to me a reading that is forced upon us by the play itself. It is a reading in which I am confirmed by Mr. Danby. Yet it is certainly not the whole story. The vitality of the poetry is not *only* the vitality of the creating mind, disengaged, as it were, from what it evokes with such clear-sighted realism; and the effect on the reader or spectator is not *only* that of watching the inevitable working out of a self-consuming passion. Passages that compel a 'positive' response to the central love relationship may be far fewer than the usual romantic accounts of the play suggest, but they are certainly there,—and not only, as Mr. Danby suggests, when the lovers are separated or about to part:—

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[2]It is entirely in keeping that, after the reconciliation, when Antony 'is Antony again', he calls for 'one other gaudy night . . . fill our bowls once more.'

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when you sued staying,
Then was the time for words: no going then;
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,
But was a race of heaven.

The description of Cleopatra by Enobarbus (to an audience—it is a characteristic touch—a little too eager for news from Egypt) has a freshness and energy counteracting its suggestions of a deliberate sensuousness; and the famous Cydnus passage modulates easily into a racy buoyancy:—

The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthroned i' the market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too
And made a gap in nature.

And it is not only a matter of isolated passages or small touches that compel our sympathy or admiration: the whole poetry of 'Egypt'—in marked contrast to the 'Roman' poetry of buildings and substantial *things*—evokes a world of natural forces within which Antony and Cleopatra have their being.

This, then, is what the play asks of us: to be true to both these impressions of the presented relationship. On the one hand, a closed circle of passion, of which the boasted 'variety' is, in the end, entirely dependent on the application of fresh stimulants; on the other hand, natural force and fertility and spontaneous human feeling, all apparently inextricably tied ('this knot intrinsicate') with passions directed to death. It is this paradox which is expressed in the metaphysical conceit of 'heart of loss'.

Regarded in this way the consummation of the tragedy is seen to be perfect, and perfectly in keeping. As I have said, Cleopatra's lament over the dying Antony, her later evocation of his greatness and bounty, have weighed too heavily in the impression that many people seem to take from the play as a whole. That these things are great poetry goes without saying. But the almost unbearable pathos of the last scenes, as Mr. Danby rightly insists, is for what has *not* in fact been realized.

Cleopatra: For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping: his delights
Were dolphin-like; they show'd his back above
The element they lived in: in his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket.

Dolabella: Cleopatra!

Cleopatra: Think you there was, or might be, such a man
As this I dreamt of?

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Dolabella: Gentle madam, no.

Cleopatra: You lie, up to the hearing of the gods.
But, if there be, nor ever were, one such,
It's past the size of dreaming: nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet, to imagine
An Antony, were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

The figure that Cleopatra evokes may not be fancy,—the poetry invests it with a substantial reality; but it is not the Antony that the play has given us; it is something disengaged from, or glimpsed through, that Antony. Nor should the power and beauty of Cleopatra's last great speech obscure the continued presence of something self-deceiving and unreal. She may speak of the baby at her breast that sucks the nurse asleep; but it is not, after all, a baby—new life; it is simply death.

It is, of course, one of the signs of a great writer that he can *afford* to evoke sympathy or even admiration for what, in his final judgment, is discarded or condemned. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the sense of potentiality in life's untutored energies is pushed to its limit, and Shakespeare gives the maximum weight to an experience that is finally 'placed'. If we do not feel both the vitality and the sham vitality, both the variety and the monotony, both the impulse towards life and the impulse towards death, we are missing the full experience of the play.[3] It is perhaps this that makes the tragedy so sombre in its realism, so little comforting to the romantic imagination. For Shakespeare has chosen as his tragic theme the impulse that man perhaps most readily associates with a heightened sense of life and fulfilment: fulfilment not only in continued fertility and the perpetuation of life ('the sun that quickens Nilus' slime') but in the living present ('Eternity was in our lips and eyes . . .'). It has not been part of my purpose to explore the range and depth of the poetry in which the theme of vitality twinned with frustration, of force that entangles itself with strength, is expressed; but it is, of course, the range and depth of the poetry that make Antony and Cleopatra into universal figures. At the superb close, Cleopatra—both empress and lass unparalleled—is an incarnation of sexual passion, of those primeval energies that are both necessary and destructive, that insistently demand fulfilment in their own terms, and, by insisting on their own terms, thwart the fulfilment that they seek. The scene is rich in overtones, and I do not think that it is a forced interpretation that hears in the not-so-nonsensical warnings

[3]As so often with Shakespeare, the central theme is reflected in minute peculiarities of style. The paradox at the heart of the play is kept before us in a succession of paradoxical phrases: 'what they undid, did'; 'did make defect perfection'; 'now all labour Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles Itself with strength'; 'strong toil of grace'. Compare also, 'The long day's work is done . . .' and 'The bright day is done . . .'.

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of the rural fellow with his serpent an echo from the traditional Christian myth. But this is only an echo, not a key: and the tragedy is explained—so far as it needs explanation—entirely in terms of directly presented experience. 'There is no evil impulse', says Martin Buber, 'but that which is separated from the whole being'. It is precisely this that *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* reveals.[4]

L. C. KNIGHTS.

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of *Scrutiny*.

DEAR SIR,

May I crave the privilege of your space for a protest? For some years I have been aware of a slight diffidence, or reserve, in certain quarters in regard to the placing of my Shakespearean investigations within the contemporary context. Of that, by itself, it is perhaps not for me to complain. But when the (possibly unconscious) use of my findings is accompanied by either a careful reference to subsequent writers or by an implication, direct or indirect, that my own work is negligible, a mild rejoinder may be forgiven.

My friend Mr. John Danby's essay on *Antony and Cleopatra*, called 'The Shakespearean Dialectic' in *Scrutiny*, September, 1949 pp. 196-213) is a case in point. An important part of its substance has already appeared in my two long essays in *The Imperial Theme* (1931; pp. 198-326), which he does not refer to, yet clearly, by implication, dismisses. Here are some central correspondences, those from my book italicized for clarity:—

The core of Mr. Danby's article concerns 'something deliquescent' (*i.e.*, melting) 'in the reality behind the play'; a certain 'deliquescent reality at the heart of the play' which 'incarnates itself' in the hero and heroine (198, 201). Compare from *Imperial Theme 'we should observe especially the idea of "melting", "dissolving"—it is a crucial theme in the play'* (236),

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[4]I do not think there is any need to invoke, as Mr. Danby does, 'a missing third term'. But if we look from the play to Shakespeare's achievement as a whole, it is not Cordelia that I should invoke, but Perdita. 'Fie, wrangling queen!' says Antony,

> Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,
> To weep. . . .

The 'everything' is curiously limited. In Florizel's lovely panegyric, 'What you do, sweet, still betters what is done . . .', where dancing, praying, and the performance of household tasks are brought into living relationship with the impersonal movement of the sea, there is essential variety.

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together with the *numerous examples* offered (229, 232-9). Again, 'It is the logic of a peculiarly Shakespearean dialectic. Opposites are juxtaposed, mingled, married'; this is part of 'the central process of the play' (199). Compare, *'So, too, in the story, is element everywhere blended, mated, with element'*, *'Now we feel the pressure of our mating references throughout, the constant stress on melting, dissolving, mingling'* (261-2). After asserting that 'character issues from a mutable and ambiguous flux of things,' Mr. Danby quotes Antony's speech on cloud-formations which 'can be generalised to cover the whole play' (198). 'Flux'. *Imperial Theme* likewise offers Antony's cloud-speech as an example, observing: *'He would end these swift changes from unreality to unreality by the last alternation from the flux of life to the flux of death'*. (284). With 'The swinging ambivalences—the alternatives and ambiguities constantly proposed to choice . . . the speed and oscillation' (201) compare: *'Antony's swift oscillations from despair to reckless courage, from loathing to love'*; *'now our oscillation is both fast and violent'*; *'the sweep of their oscillations getting wider and faster'*; *'a strange see-saw motion of the spirit, an oscillating tendency, back and forth, a "varying" '* (277, 281, 287, 265). 'The law is general . . . the tidal swing of the opposites on which all things balance on a motion that rots them away', 'The "varying tide" by which everything in the play is moved' (205, 207). 'Varying' again. Compare: *'The persons seem unevenly balanced, swaying, first one side, then the other'*; *'this wavering, this ebbing and flowing, of love's vision'*; *'this wavering, ebb and flow, of the spirit, a shifting, varying psychology'*; *'like a boat tossing idly on a vast sea'* (265, 274-5, 280). After these passages both 'Shakespearean Dialectic' and *Imperial Theme* refer to both (i) the 'vagabond flag' passage and (ii) 'the swan's down-feather' passage ('Shakespearean Dialectic' 207; *Imperial Theme* 274). Of Pompey's speech on shipboard, 'Even soldierly honour is rooted in the ambiguous' (205) corresponds to *'There is (here) a curious blending of sophistry and honour'* (266). Of people loved after death, though not before, compare 'Shakespearean Dialectic' 203-5 with *Imperial Theme* 287-8 (and elsewhere). Indeed, Mr. Danby's 'ambivalence that runs through everything in the play' (200) was very fully discussed in *The Imperial Theme* in relation to a psychology *'varying between positive and negative, alternately charged with interchanging significance'* (288-9). This 'dialectic' was my own main instrument of analysis, whether of persons or plot.

Is it unreasonable to suggest that some reference should have appeared to my essays? That Mr. Danby's final reaction is less positive than mine, that he feels, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, that the various 'minglings' end in an ultimate dissolution, is not to the point. Besides, he misunderstands. 'Cleopatra', he says, with clear reference to, among others, my own work, 'has been loved by recent commentators not wisely but too well'; 'recent criticism has seen the play as the epiphany of the soldier in the

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lover, and the reassurance of all concerned that death is not the end'. He refers to a 'sentimental reaction' in the lovers' favour (208, 210, 211). My second essay emphasized continually the sordid realism, in parts, of Shakespeare's treatment, noting in Cleopatra an *'inscrutably evil callousness', 'an utterly selfish streak of bottomless evil'* (304). 'Cleopatra', says Mr. Danby, 'is Eve and Woman . . . She is also Circe' (209). Exactly: *'Cleopatra is not one, but all woman . . . She is Dido, or Milton's Eve', with Eve's 'primal' evil* (297, 304); she is also *Jezebel, Medusa, Dalilah* (309), and *Lady Macbeth* (290, 301). Mr. Danby follows me in observing that she dies partly to save herself. The good I found in Cleopatra was a metaphysical, not a moral, good; a good of *totality* (310). Mr. Danby's failure to react to the positive emphasis of Act V is marked by his not facing Cleopatra's final transcending of 'deliquescence' and fluidity in 'I am marble constant; now the fleeting moon no planet is of mine'; nor her dream; nor the fig-vendor's overtones of meaning (*Imperial Theme,* 313-8); nor 'Husband, I come'. Through writing, it seems, as a Christian apologist, Mr. Danby is significantly forced back on regarding this peculiarly humanistic work, in Mr. Eliot's opinion (in his essay on *Hamlet*) one of Shakespeare's two 'most assured' artistic successes, as merely 'a technical *tour de force* which Shakespeare enjoyed for its own sake' (212).

In his most important study *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (1949) Mr. Danby mainly follows *The Wheel of Fire* and *The Shakespearean Tempest,* though without reference, in regard to his central substances: (i) the two sorts of nature in *King Lear;* (ii) Lear, Edmund and Cordelia as typifying different strata of human development; and (iii) the symbolic thunder. These he relates—and I do not wish to deny the brilliance and value of his expansion—to theological issues, while noting, with obvious reference to such work as mine: 'Atomization since Bradley has gone even further. Shakespeare's story has been broken down into separate and jarring bits: "themes", "world-views", "ideas", even "images". The co-ordinating principle of story has been overlooked' (203). This 'atomization' he has nevertheless found extremely useful. Not only is his whole book based on it, but during the course of his argument he devotes (no doubt quite unconsciously) three pages (157-160) to a most accurate, indeed model, précis of my interpretation of *Troilus and Cressida* in *The Wheel of Fire* ('The Trojans are chivalrous idealists, the Greeks practical realists', Troilus and Hector as representatives respectively of faith and reason, etc.).

Mr. D. A. Traversi's recent essay on *The Tempest* (*Scrutiny,* June, 1949) follows in general outline the reading of Colin Still and in detail (*e.g.,* the tempest-symbol, the Antonio and Sebastian plot as recapitulating earlier plays, Prospero compared as controller of the action with Duke Vincentio, etc.) my own treatment in *The Crown of Life* (1947), which was nevertheless recently dismissed in your pages as at the best 'not negligible', with the rider that I must probably be content to find my influence indirect and unacknow-

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ledged. I do not myself see the necessity. With Mr. Traversi, I have no grumble; one cannot be always acknowledging; but there are limits—and they are reached when those influenced, to quote an amusing reviewer of *The Crown of Life,* 'crib' with one hand what they 'crab' with the other!

Though no associate of the critical school of *Scrutiny,* I can respect it; and I have cause to be grateful for its notice in the past, and to honour its normal regard to the statement of obligations. It is neither *Scrutiny,* nor Mr. Danby, with whom I am at odds. I am sure no hostility is intended. What worries me is rather a certain 'climate of opinion'. I have recently had cause to register, by the courtesy of the editors concerned, not dis-similar protests in *The Review of English Studies* (Oct., 1946) and *The Kenyon Review* (Winter, 1949). My present complaint is one of many.

A recent broadcast by Mr. J. Isaacs, called 'New Light on Shakespeare' and claiming to be an expert assessment of critical innovations in our time (*The Listener,* 7 July, 1949), while noting the imagistic investigations of Prof. Spurgeon and according high praise to the more 'organic approach' of Dr. Clemen, of my own work made no mention whatsoever. Again, *Shakespeare Survey II* contains an excellent article, 'The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*' by Miss Elizabeth Marie Pope, relating the exact substance and many of the quotations of my essay '*Measure for Measure* and the Gospels' in *The Wheel of Fire* to contemporary religious thought, rather in the manner of Mr. Danby on *King Lear.* She notes the significance of the play's title, quoting other New Testament reminders (66), the Duke as a failure in secular authority by reason of his merciful nature (76), Angelo as at a loss, *in contrast to the Duke's self-knowledge,* before his own uprising instincts (76), the Duke as 'moving through so much of the action like an embodied Providence', a person 'with curiously allegorical overtones' (71), like God (80); the importance and nature of the final forgiveness of Angelo by (i) Mariana and (ii) Isabella (79); the play's conclusion in general as a 'deliberate effort' towards a profoundly merciful, yet patterned, justice (79-80); indeed, the whole work as a wrestling with problems of 'judgment, tolerance, mercy, retaliation in kind and Christian forgiveness as they appear to the holder of public office' (75). All this is presented without specific references, though she observes the comments on Shakespeare's Christian treatment here of law, authority, justice and mercy by 'such scholars as Roy Battenhouse, C. J. Sisson, and R. W. Chambers' (66), alluding to work that appeared, respectively, in 1946, 1934, and 1937, while making no indication whatsoever concerning the primary and only inclusive source in *The Wheel of Fire,* 1930, of which she might surely be expected to know since Dr. Battenhouse himself gave full and proper references.[1] I have been

[1]I have observed that Prof. R. W. Chambers' essay is regularly cited for ideas that appeared earlier and with greater elaboration in '*Measure for Measure* and the Gospels'.

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told that references to my own work are sometimes avoided in academic and critical circles for reasons of 'policy'; exactly why, I cannot say. I hope this is wrong, and shall be only too happy to be assured of it.

It would be, no doubt, very dignified to keep silent; but where the favour of publishers—the true patrons of our time—is needed and the fight for reprints arduous, the climate of opinion counts. However, let me end on a less personal note. I am fighting for something which *Scrutiny* might call 'romantic'; for the essence of discovery, and its rights. What those earlier volumes discovered was at first often enough discounted as madness by scholar and critic as incompatible with the thought of Shakespeare's *milieu*. Now that the discoveries have become common property, a new 'thought of Shakespeare's time'—as with Dr. Tillyard's studies, Mr. Danby's *King Lear*, Miss Pope's *Measure for Measure*—is adjusted, wherever possible, to meet them. But—and this is my final point—it was the romantic attitude and technique that discovered them, and tapped the basic substances of the enduring poetry for scholar and critic to dress as they may, and as knowledge grows. I respect, and always have respected, both, in their spheres; all I ask for is an open and friendly relationship.

G. WILSON KNIGHT.

TO THE EDITORS OF *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

There is very little I would wish to say in reply to Mr. Wilson Knight's letter. I can only assure Mr. Knight, quite simply, that neither my book nor my article derive from him. Both derive from that period of ferment in the late '20's and early '30's which threw up—especially in Cambridge—quite a number of readers of Shakespeare who were beginning to read Shakespeare's plays as poems. This is something that cannot be argued, but only asserted. But I hope Mr. Wilson Knight will believe me.

However, he has made his charges public, and the public in these matters is in the best position to judge. Maybe those who read his letter will look up all the passages in his work which he claims I have used, and draw their own conclusions.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN F. DANBY.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

L. H. MYERS AND THE CRITICAL FUNCTION: REBUKE AND REPLY.

To the Editors of *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

The chief value of *Scrutiny*'s critical method is that judgments are based upon close examination of actual texts, and not upon established reputation, whether that reputation has been established by *The Times Literary Supplement* or by *Scrutiny* itself. It is therefore disturbing to find that *Scrutiny* writers are some of them falling into the habit of delivering judgment on authors in batches, without even taking the trouble to specify their individual offences. To quote a sentence from Mr. H. A. Mason (*Measure for Measure: or Anglo-American Exchanges, Scrutiny* March 1949): 'To fail to be impressed by Auden, Spender, Dylan Thomas, *et hoc genus omne*, and to say so in public is described as "fouling the nest" '. Can Mr. Mason really think that Dylan Thomas is of the same *genus* as Auden? And if he does, are we not entitled to some illustration?

In the same number of *Scrutiny* Mr. R. C. Churchill writes: 'Apparently it has never occurred to [Dr. Joad] that some people preferred, and still prefer, and for cultural-spiritual reasons, James and Conrad and Yeats to their contemporaries (roughly speaking) Shaw and Wells and Bennett; and that such people stand a better chance of appreciating Joyce, Lawrence, Forster, Owen, Thomas, Rosenberg, Pound, Eliot, Woolf, Dawson, Powys, Myers, etc. . . .' Mr. Churchill neither specifies his 'cultural-spiritual reasons', nor gives any good reason for his grouping of Joyce and Lawrence with 'Dawson, Powys, Myers, etc.'.

To quote again from Mr. Mason: 'The foreigner does not spontaneously prefer, say, Graham Greene to L. H. Myers. He hears only of the former, and takes him as representative of the best the English can do in the "philosophical novelist's" line'. Here we see Mr. Mason contemptuously dismissing a writer by the simple process of mentioning him in the same breath with L. H. Myers, whom we are invited to accept, without qualification and without evidence, as a touchstone of literary virtue.

Since the name of L. H. Myers has been mentioned twice with reverence in one number of *Scrutiny*, it may be useful to examine a passage from this author, a passage picked out from the first of his novels to hand—his *Clio*, published by Penguin Books. Here is his description of a man on his deathbed taking a last farewell of his wife:

'He went on speaking, but with frequent lapses into silence. She could see that he was quite at his ease. Presently he threw

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out: "Death saves one, you know, from a multitude of follies!" and his smile explained well enough what he meant.

'"Marion", he said a little later, "I doubt whether you realise how much you have been in my thoughts during the twenty-odd years that I've known you. Your vitality, your courage, your never-failing charm . . ." His voice died away, but she just caught the words "an inborn gallantry of character".

'To this again she said nothing. He should never know that his tribute of praise fell upon a heart bitter with despair. Her courage! Good God! where was her courage now? Little did he realise that she was passing through a spiritual ordeal no less severe than his. For her the hour about to strike was the hour not of bereavement only but also of renunciation. She felt—and the persuasion this time was irresistible—that her Indian summer was drawing to a close. She might have told him that he was luckier than she; for whilst he was merely passing from waking into sleep, she was slipping from Life into Death-in-Life. She was entering the last stage of a woman's existence, when she has to live unsupported by the expectation, conscious or unconscious, of a love affair.'

The whole context should be studied; but perhaps this quotation is enough to show what Myers is capable of. The equating of a woman's 'need' for erotic stimulus with the fact of an actual death is a sufficient comment on Myers' sensibility; his description of a conscious death as a 'passing from waking into sleep', together with such phrases as '"Your vitality, your courage, your never-failing charm . . ." . . ."an inborn gallantry of character". . . Her courage! Good God! where was her courage now? . . .'; these sufficiently reveal the quality of the writer's perceptions and feelings.

Can this passage, in other words, be safely quoted to a foreigner as the work of an author who is to be accepted as a standard of judgment (for that, after all, is what both Mr. Mason and Mr. Churchill clearly imply)? Is it not, on the contrary, cheap, slick, vulgar writing? It seems to us that *Scrutiny* writers are some of them in danger of resting complacently in their own past judgments, instead of continuing the strenuous task of close critical examination and revaluing, which has won them the honourable title of *scrutineers*. Could we not have more scrutiny and less casual, unsupported condemnation or reverence? Perhaps a 'Revaluation' of 'Powys, Myers, etc.' might next be undertaken. We have no doubt that Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, and Lawrence will stand any amount of critical re-examination; but we should not be offered dogmatic assertion in the place of critical illumination, and even the less significant authors have the right to a fair trial.

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A journal that attempts to maintain the function of criticism must be permitted some reliance on its past work. The effective performance of the function is necessarily a long-term affair. It would hardly be possible to proceed at all if one were forbidden to assume any judgment or valuation without demonstrating it. Of course, there is always the danger of assuming too easily, of resting too much on past work, and of slipping into a licentious economy; and it is wholesome to be kept reminded of the danger by such challenges as the present.

To say this, however, is not to say that our correspondents' rebuke is wholly just. So far, indeed, as it relates to Mr. Mason's '*hoc genus omne*' we are not clear what their intention is. 'Can Mr. Mason', they ask, 'really think that Dylan Thomas is of the same *genus* as Auden?' The '*genus*'—Mr. Mason's intention seems to us plain enough—is of writers passing current as established major values whose reputations, unjustified by any creative achievement, are matters of mere fashion and of routine acceptance. To which of the two writers mentioned do our correspondents consider the bracketing to be unfair? The adverse criticism of Auden has been argued and illustrated in these pages more than half-a-dozen times by almost as many different reviewers (including Mr. Mason). Dylan Thomas, it is true, has not had as much attention. But a critique of him appeared as recently as Summer 1946 (Vol. XIV, No. 1), and a book on him—though, of course, our correspondents couldn't have foreseen this—was made the occasion for a critical repondering in our last issue (Vol. XVI, No. 3).

The inclusion of the two poets for the given purpose in the same 'genus' seems to us critically just; grounds have been given, and we cannot see what our correspondents find to object to. Is it that historically Auden counts a great deal more, having been a major influence, and that he may reasonably be judged to have had a more impressive talent? But these considerations do not affect Mr. Mason's point, which is that, while both Auden and Thomas pass current internationally as established values, successors in the line of English poets, whatever their own differing magnitudes and kinds, of Mr. Eliot, neither of them, if creative achievement establishes a man a poet, has begun to make good the claims so universally endorsed. Neither exists in the same sky as Mr. Eliot for comparisons of magnitude and significance. Their reputations illustrate both the abeyance in our time of the critical function, and the power of the system that has succeeded in substituting its own solidarity-values (see Mr. John Hayward's British Council booklet, *Prose Literature since 1939*, commented on in *Scrutiny*, Vol. XV, No. 4, p. 313) for those which properly concern criticism.

The system, Mr. Mason was testifying in the passage about Graham Greene and L. H. Myers to which objection has been taken, controls British cultural relations with the Continent. Our correspondents, we gather, do not so much object to the dismissal

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of Graham Greene (whom we have not yet dealt with in these pages—the difficulty has been to find a reviewer prepared to spend the necessary time on him) as to the acceptance of L. H. Myers—the assumption that a critic in *Scrutiny* has a right to refer to him without argument as a novelist who commands a high valuation. Where Myers is in question the Editors tend to rest on the consciousness that he has had close and extended critical attention in *Scrutiny*—that he had here, in fact, the first critique (we believe) that he ever received. Challenged, we have to confess that that was fifteen years ago (June 1934, Vol. III, No. 1). Still, his subsequent books were reviewed in these pages and, after all, since space is limited and there are always so many new things calling for notice, may we not reasonably plead our consciousness that there was D. W. Harding's original critique to refer back to?

It will be in place to do some quoting from it here. Commenting on the passage from *The Clio*, and underlining some phrases in it, our correspondents say: 'these sufficiently reveal the quality of the writer's perceptions and feelings'. Haven't we here, they ask, 'cheap, slick, vulgar writing'? But such conclusions cannot be safely drawn without the study of context they themselves prescribe, but do not actually seem to have made. To comment on the passages as they do is like criticizing James Joyce for the cheapness and vulgarity of Gertie MacDowell's soliloquies. As Harding observes, with illustrations, 'unfortunate prose' can be found which 'for many people must be a serious obstacle to the appreciation of his work's excellence'. But before he has observed this he has discussed both the nature of Myers' interests and aims, and the difference between *The Clio* and the other books.

> '*The Clio* as a whole, in spite of the significance of this theme, lacks richness and importance. Its comparative failure is closely related to a difference in the treatment of character between this book and the others, the immediate sign of the difference being that you are invited to feel a little superior to the characters here whereas in the other novels you respect them'.

As for the theme:

> 'In all four of his novels L. H. Myers is concerned with the theme of individual development in a civilized society, a society in which leisure and a tradition of culture make possible the practised intelligence and sensibility which he takes to be necessary conditions of development, and in fact in *The Clio* he sees what can be said for this civilized background in the absence of any of the highly developed individuals whom he's really interested in'.

Sir James is the character who is dying in the passage that our correspondents quote. Of him Harding says:

> 'Sir James is not presented as anything other than a rather selfish man of small elegant life. The superficiality (in one sense)

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of the civilization he stands for is stressed not only explicitly in the triviality of many of the characters but also by the recurrent contrast between it and the elementary impulses and physical facts below it. The death of Sir James is the most profound statement of the theme; but it also appears in his mild lechery just before his illness'.

Of *The Clio*, again, Harding says:

'In that book, although his theme is profound, underlying even the subtlest lives, Myers is attempting to present it in the lives of people who are not, as individuals, of any great interest. It is for this reason that one is made to feel aloof from the characters; it is only the total pattern that they contribute to which can make any claim on our interest. In this technical respect *The Clio* can be classed with, say, T. F. Powys's novels, although with its less richly specific presentation of the theme and its less bold and well-knit pattern it is far inferior to Powys's best work. This treatment of character is probably only possible when a novel's themes are the simple profundities'.

It should be plain, then, that, for all its inferiority (and it is in some ways a decidedly unpleasant book), *The Clio* need not be dismissed as cheap, and unworthy the sensitive reader's attention. Further, as Harding shows, it *is*, by the standard of what entitles Myers to the kind of respectful reference that our correspondents object to, inferior. Harding says:

'In his better work Myers is engrossed with the subtler problems which cannot exist except for those who are living finely, and which besides raising fundamental issues also make up the detailed texture of living; and these novels, instead of being an *expression* of problems and beliefs, are rather a means in themselves of defining the problems and clarifying the beliefs. With this change of aim goes a change in the use of character. The people represented now are of the kind who have an immediate personal relevance for you apart from the total pattern of the novel. The heroes are at least as subtle and as complex in interest and feelings as you, and the villains—even if you feel superior to them—are formidable'.

When in *Scrutiny* Myers is referred to as a writer of major interest in modern English fiction, it is above all *The Root and the Flower* that one has in mind. (This trilogy is now incorporated in the one-volume tetralogy, *The Near and the Far*, the last part of which, *The Pool of Vishnu*, hardly adds strength to the whole.) Perhaps it is well to add that to take Myers as a writer of major interest who repays the most serious kind of attention is not to claim for him the status of great novelist. Harding's concluding paragraph runs:

'The worth of Myers' work ought perhaps to be regarded as largely independent of one's opinion of the novels as works of

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art, where judgments may differ widely; essentially they are means of communicating, and they would still be of remarkable value if you concluded that they were scientific essays of an unusual kind. Their first value lies in the fact that they do succeed—by whatever means—in conveying extremely clear and sensitive insight into the conditions of adult and self-responsible lives in a civilized society'.

Myers was enough of a novelist to justify the mode in which he chose to develop his themes and his interests; and if his novels do not repay the intense and sustained attention of the serious and educated, then what fiction produced in English since the death of Lawrence does?

Our correspondents seem to object again to the attribution of distinguished status to T. F. Powys. And it is true that the high valuation has not, in *Scrutiny*, been backed by any critical study—though certain of those who were most concerned in founding *Scrutiny* had given close critical study to Powys in the days when his most important works were coming out. Critiques have been planned from time to time; but, owing to a series of accidents, have not actually appeared. We hope the omission will be repaired before long. Meanwhile it should surely be found not extravagant to assume a general agreement that *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and *Fables* represent a remarkably original art that deserves serious critical appraisal. Bro. George Every, in a book reviewed elsewhere in this issue, appears to endorse his Mr. Norman Nicholson's bracketing of Powys with Joyce as 'blasphemous and bawdy'. Actually, Powys's treatment of human life is as fundamentally serious and religious as Bunyan's (the mention of whom perhaps sufficiently affects the dissociation from Joyce); and to see Powys as 'bawdy' is to betray an extreme moral obtuseness.

F.R.L.

POETRY PRIZES FOR THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN, 1951.

Under the above head, we have received (O.H.M.S.) from the Chief Press Officer of the Festival the information that the Arts Council of Great Britain, in connexion with the Festival of Britain, 1951, will offer Poetry Prizes, to the value of £1,100. The following Panel of Judges has been appointed: Sir Kenneth Clark (*Chairman*), Professor C. M. Bowra, Lord David Cecil, Mr. John Hayward, Mr. George Rylands, Mr. Basil Willey.

No doubt this Panel will do as well as any that one can conceive of as being found eligible, by the people who decide these things (who are they?), for such a responsibility. Nevertheless, the qualifications of these appointed national judges seem peculiarly worthy of notice.

The Chairman, Sir Kenneth Clark, has never been known as a critic of poetry, or literature—except that he wrote in *Horizon*

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an appreciation (in the vulgar sense) of Dr. Edith Sitwell as great poet.

Professor Bowra has written a separately published essay (again 'appreciative') of Dr. Sitwell's verse. He wrote a book on 'Symbolism' in poetry in which his main term remained so undefined, and was applied so variously, as to be of little use as a critical instrument. His reputation is based on his ability to write as a critical authority on the poetry of other languages, including Russian. He has given no evidence of any powers as a critic of English poetry.

Lord David Cecil made his *début* as a biographer. He has written a book on Hardy's novels that has been dealt with in these pages (Vol. XI, No. 3). He has also written about other novelists. What grounds, one wonders (other than his having succeeded to a Chair of Poetry at Oxford), would his warmest admirers urge to establish a presumption of his fitness to judge of poetry—and of contemporary poetry?

Mr. John Hayward is known as a specialist scholar who has done some editing. He wrote the British Council booklet referred to above, *Prose Literature since 1939*, in which, to quote our own comment, he presented the 'currency-values of Metropolitan literary society and the associated University *milieux* as the distinctions and achievements of contemporary England'.

Mr. George Rylands is known as an actor-producer of Elizabethan drama.

Of Mr. Basil Willey it can at least be said that he holds a Chair of English Literature. But it must be at once added that the books on which his reputation rests are remote from literary criticism, and offer no grounds at all for attributing to the writer any practice in the judgment of poetry.

It seems to us eloquent of the state of affairs that has been discussed here that the Arts Council of Great Britain, undertaking to use for the encouragement of poetry in this country the resources at its disposal, should have been able without bracing itself for a storm of protest or ridicule to invest with supreme critical authority a Panel so composed. It seems to us that, given for fellow-members any five of this Panel, no critic truly qualified would have consented to serve on it. And it seems to us that, even if by chance the distribution of the prizes should be such as to tend to the encouragement of such genuine creative gifts as may be found among the competitors, more harm than good will have been done to the cause of English poetry, which is inseparable from the cause of English criticism.

But, it will be asked, what other kinds of appointment could those responsible have made? They had to find persons of some formal standing whose names were known. Things being as they are to-day, what Panel both acceptable and truly qualified could one have chosen for them? And would things have been so much better in the time of Edmund Gosse? In fact, hasn't one to go back to the time of Leslie Stephen to find an England in which

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the qualified authorities could be counted on to be sufficiently known and respected? (Though it must be remembered that Gosse knew and respected Henry James, whose refusal to countenance the 'associational process' was commented on in *Scrutiny* XIV, 2. The successors of Gosse would certainly not be inclined to parade respect for a similarly anti-associational contemporary genius, and they would be the reverse of inclined—or qualified—to promote his recognition.)

Yet there *is* something new in the contemporary situation. It is that to-day those whose views tell decisively in the organs and institutions of taste and cultural authority aid and abet, less and more innocently, the systematic suppression of criticism. *The Criterion* (except for marginal sneers in the back pages) never mentioned *Scrutiny*. It is not an accident that *The Times Literary Supplement*, which conscientiously reviews the most insignificant periodicals, never gives *Scrutiny* the shortest notice. Yet there is now a general recognition in all the literary and academic centres of the English-speaking world, and wherever English literature is studied, that *Scrutiny*, whatever its faults and shortcomings, has for seventeen years maintained a strenuous and lonely pre-eminence in the language as representing the function of criticism.

THE SHAKESPEARE INDUSTRY: PROGRESS REPORT

SHAKESPEARE SURVEY 2, edited by Allardyce Nicoll (Cambridge University Press, 12/6).

There is no fall in the level of productivity in the Shakespeare industry. If one were not directly conscious of the continued output of books—scholarly, critical, popular and merely eccentric, such an enterprise as *Shakespeare Survey* would be an effective reminder. Described as an annual survey of Shakespearean study and production, it appears under the highest auspices, sponsored jointly by the University of Birmingham, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and edited by Professor Allardyce Nicoll with the assistance of an advisory board which musters a fair selection of the familiar distinguished names. This, the second number, contains articles ranging from bibliography and the history of the Elizabethan playhouse to accounts of recent stage production, Shakespeare in France, critical articles, and 'The Year's Contributions to Shakespearean Study'.

But if we ask what precisely *is* Shakespearean Study, and what is its relevance, the answer seems to be so general as to be almost meaningless. *Scrutiny* has always insisted, and at the risk of wearisome repetition it must be said again, that scholarship, to be profitable and alive, must start from a critical interest and answer

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critical questions. This is not only because without this start it will lack adequate direction and point, plodding on in the vague hope that almost any kind of fact may possibly some day be useful to someone, but for the more important reason that unless it takes its origin from a conscious critical point of view it will most probably be motivated by unconscious or half-conscious critical assumptions and prejudices. In so far as these are a matter of taking over accepted values and conventional attitudes, they will in practice be based on the criticism of the past rather than upon a living concern with what the works under discussion mean to us today. As Mr. Eliot has reminded us, there is no escape from the criticism of the past except through the criticism of the present. These considerations would of course apply to a great deal of general literary scholarship in the academic journals: if one finds much of it deadening and depressing it is not through a simple prejudice against research and its unspectacular labours, but from a conviction that lacking this critical direction much of it is labour misdirected and energy wasted. On these general questions, *Shakespeare Survey* does little to reassure us. The idea of providing a clearing-house for all kinds of work related to Shakespeare is admirable enough in the abstract, and to bring scholarship and criticism together in a significant relation would be a positive achievement. But a general belief that Shakespeare is important hardly gives a sufficient basis of common ground among the contributors. What is needed is some controlling conception of the precise way in which Shakespeare's work matters to us today, and that, of course, implies some measure of agreement about the function of poetry and of poetic drama in particular, or at least some determination to work out these fundamental problems co-operatively.

The lack of any such controlling conviction shows itself in the article on the year's contributions, divided into three sections: criticism, by Professor Ellis-Fermor; Shakespeare's Life and Times, by Professor D. J. Gordon; and textual studies, by Mr. J. G. Macmanaway. There is a tendency here to fall between two stools: one feels that the accounts should either be written from a much more definite critical position, with more drastic selection, or that they should be simply exhaustive lists compiled purely for reference. This is most obvious in the first section, though it applies to all three to some extent: the second makes most effort towards a critical survey. As things are, it is often difficult to see the principle behind omissions and inclusions alike. Why, for instance, is there no reference to Mr. J. C. Maxwell's essay on *Timon of Athens* (*Scrutiny*, Summer, 1948)? Shorter notes of his are recorded and there is mention of articles in the two previous numbers of *Scrutiny*: it can hardly be a simple question of date of publication, since M. Fluchère's book, which appeared some months later, is duly noted.

That all is not well seems to be the feeling behind an oddly mixed essay on 'The Trend of Shakespearean Scholarship' by

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Professor Hardin Craig. Though somewhat excessively respectful to the 'scientific' investigators and specialists, he is aware of the danger of extremes like those 'modern cosmological studies which would have us believe in an Elizabethan uniformity of mind greater than the farthest dreams of a totalitarian state.' He maintains that 'scholarship, like all scientific investigation, is inadequate when it approaches the region where Shakespeare's greatest greatness lies', and of his own prescription that we 'make ourselves at home in the Renaissance' he remarks, 'The attempt may well turn out to be factitious: without the kindling of imagination it is sure to be so.' One is glad to find the emphasis laid upon Shakespeare's meaning and its importance—'It is a disservice to Shakespeare and to the modern world to misinterpret his plays.' But he tails off into generalities about the multiple ends of Renaissance art, and his examples of great criticism is Granville Barker's last Preface—'the best study of *Coriolanus* ever achieved by a critic'. Now this Preface is a great improvement on any earlier account of the play from the orthodox angle, and its honesty and thoroughness is rightly commended. But it does not quite penetrate to the essential quality of the play: one misses an adequate account of the total effect of the poetry in giving concrete embodiment to an ironic study of political and moral disharmony. Some aspects of the play's atmosphere are better described by Mr. Wilson Knight in *The Imperial Theme*, though his chapter is unequal: for an analysis leading us into the central experience of the work we have to go to Mr. D. A. Traversi's essay (*Scrutiny*, June, 1937) which one would be glad to see reprinted and made more accessible.

The most valuable essay in the whole volume is Miss Pope's 'The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*'. This is an example of a scholarly enquiry which sets out to test certain critical conclusions about the play by asking whether or not the ideas and beliefs they assume would be likely to occur to the Elizabethan mind. In an investigation of commentaries, sermons and tracts, Miss Pope examines first the contemporary theological doctrines of justice and mercy, and secondly the special responsibilities of the Christian governor, showing how closely the leading ideas of the play can be related to these current opinions. She concludes that Shakespeare in this play is 'not so much rejecting the ordinary Christian doctrine of the Renaissance as clarifying it, strengthening it, and holding it true to its own deepest implications'. We are not entitled to draw direct conclusions about Shakespeare's own beliefs, but we can say that 'when he put his mind to it, he could produce a more coherent, a more independent, and in the last analysis a more Christian piece of thinking on the subject than nine out of ten professional Renaissance theologians'.

A purely critical contribution comes from Professor Morozov, of Moscow, on 'The Individualization of Shakespeare's Characters through Imagery'. Noting that 'of recent years, Shakespeare is coming more and more to be regarded chiefly as a "dramatic poet" '. The realism of Shakespeare's characters, their specific

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psychological traits, and hence distinctive styles of speech, are often being thrown into obscurity', he sets out to confirm Shakespeare's realism—'that Shakespeare's characters do not speak for the author, but, so to say, for themselves'. That they might conceivably speak for both at the same time, or sometimes for one and sometimes for the other, is not, apparently, thought possible. Had Professor Morozov gone on to show how the characteristic imagery of the various *personæ* is often a way of presenting them and also of determining our attitude towards them, besides performing other functions in a total poetic context, he could have made a valuable contribution. All he does in fact is to list the dominant images in the speech of a number of characters without any sufficient analysis of their effect or their significance. The total result is not much more than the older critics achieved with less fuss. The detailed analysis shows an inadequate conception of the way poetry works, and the general attitude suggests considerable naïvety about Elizabethan dramatic conventions. What is rather disquieting is to find the essay apparently considered important by so eminent an editorial board. But it is only too obvious that the study of imagery has achieved respectability in its least useful form—isolated, that is, from rhythm, tone and general poetic effect.

Two articles of somewhat similar type are Miss St. Clare Byrne's 'Fifty Years of Shakespearean Production' and M. Henri Fluchère's 'Shakespeare in France, 1900-1948'. Both are interesting as evidence of the extraordinary difficulty of inducing actors and producers to allow Shakespeare to speak for himself: on this point the first article is perhaps a little too optimistic. The idea that the greatest English dramatic poet might possibly have known what he was about has penetrated very slowly, and continual vigilance is needed against the powerful vested interests in rearranging his work for him. Only recently a highly praised production of *Henry IV, Part II* omitted the important incident of Lancaster's politic treachery, with its ironic implications and its relation to the play's total feeling. And what possible justification can there be for presenting cut versions in the Third Programme? Miss St. Clare Byrne's article is illustrated by some interesting photographs, but the captions to Plate IV seem to have been misplaced. M. Fluchère is concerned with much more than stage production, though he mentions it in passing, and many of his comments on French Shakespeareans would apply equally well to their English counterparts, as when, writing of the state of affairs at the beginning of the century he says 'The bogy of psychology had assumed the dignity of an academic vested interest. And the party from which one should reasonably have expected some enlightenment, namely the body of university teachers, was lost in the sands of erudite research . . . this was nothing more, on the whole, than a form of escapism—escape from the main problems, which are, and always have been, aesthetic or artistic problems'.

For the rest, we are given a note by Professor Dover Wilson on Jonson's criticisms of *Julius Cæsar;* a learned summary of the

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problems connected with Shakespeare's assumed contributions to *The Booke of Sir Thomas More,* with a reproduction of the passages in question, by Professor R. C. Bald; a note on 'An original drawing of the Globe Theatre' by Mr. I. A. Shapiro; an account by Mr. Leslie Hotson of the schemes from 1620 onwards for a London amphitheatre (which do not seem very relevant to the study of Shakespeare) and some international news.

R. G. Cox.

THE LOGIC OF CHRISTIAN DISCRIMINATION

POETRY AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, by George Every (*S.C.M. Press,* 2/6).

I had occasion recently in these pages to observe that Christian Discrimination had come to seem to me a decidedly bad thing. This little book of Bro. George Every's has the air of having been designed defiantly to justify that conclusion. It can be recommended for a brief perusal as showing unambiguously what in the concrete Christian Discrimination is, and where its logic leads.

One might, after looking through the book, start by asking why Mr. Every has devoted so much time to poetry, and to creative literature in general, since (I hope I may be forgiven for saying) he shows no compelling interest in it, and no aptitude for its study. The answer he would give us is to be found in the first sentence of his Preface:

> 'This book is intended as an introduction to contemporary poetry, considered as the sensitive spot in the modern mind, where a new response to life, a new outlook upon the world, is taking shape'.

He follows it up with a sentence that hardly clarifies the idea, and wouldn't, I think, have been left standing if anyone had asked him what he meant by it:

> 'The best poem is the most sensitive not only to the thoughts and feelings of the author, but to those of other people with whom he is in constant communication'.

Still, I see what's in his mind. It's the idea that, in the given form, derives its currency from I. A. Richards:

> 'The poet is the point at which the growth of the mind shows itself'.

But though this is the idea that seems to Mr. Every to explain his dealings with poetry, he doesn't, as to be consistent he should, go on to try and be a critic. He knows beforehand, in a general kind of way, what new responses to life and what 'new outlook upon the world' are to be looked for as making a writer significant and important. They go with his conviction that the most important activity to-day is to promote a Christian revival. He nowhere

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begins to come near the business of literary criticism, and it is difficult to see what, apart from names, asserted importances, and impressive generalities his pupils (the substance of the book was given as lectures) can have got from him:

> '. . . the younger poets who came to light in 1937-42, such voices as Dylan Thomas, David Gascoyne, Alex Comfort, and Sidney Keyes, have never suffered from any illusions about the future of our civilization. For them the urgent problem is the imminence of death, the need of some significance that can be attached to dying in a world where there is no common belief in immortality'.

This suggests well enough his principles of selection and association and the nature of his commentary. It is true that he does a good deal of quoting, but the pieces of verse he quotes get no critical examination, and don't as a rule support the implicit assumption that the author matters as a poet. Mr. Every's indifference to the essential critical judgment appears at its most naked in his astonishing collocations. He can glide with perfect aplomb, in a paragraph, from *Little Gidding* to Miss Anne Ridler and Sidney Keyes without a hint of any perception on his part that, for any serious treatment of his theme, something of a change of level has occurred, and that he cannot still be dealing with significance of the same order. Here is a characteristic passage:

> 'Our greatest living novelist, Mr. E. M. Forster, deserted the novel twenty-five years ago for other forms of literature. Rex Warner seems to have done the same. Miss Elizabeth Bowen and Mr. Desmond Hawkins have not added to their early output, which had great promise for the future. The reputation of Miss Compton-Burnett, so far chiefly among her fellow-writers, rests on a departure from the naturalistic novel into stylised conversation. Her characters are elongated and foreshortened in the manner of sculpture by Mr. Henry Moore, a family group or a reclining woman. No other modern novelist cuts so close to the bone of life. As her prose recalls the verse of T. S. Eliot's plays, especially *The Family Reunion*, so her treatment of the novel as a form of poetry makes a convenient introduction to novels by two poets, Herbert Read and Charles Williams'.

Christian Discrimination, then, absolves Mr. Every from the literary critic's kind of discrimination. This comment will not disturb him; he has provided for it, and disabled it, he feels. Tell him that, if poetry matters because it is the 'sensitive spot in the modern mind . . . where a new response to life is taking shape', then to detect 'poetry' and to discriminate between that which can properly be considered as such and that in which any journalist or extension-lecturer recognizes the *Zeitgeist* becomes a task of great delicacy and importance, the due execution of which only the fostering of the highest critical standards and the observance of the most scrupulous critical discipline can hope to ensure—tell

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him this, and Mr. Every replies (his immediate audience being of the W.E.A. type):

> 'The error of the *Scrutiny* writers was to look for the intelligentsia in the same places where aesthetes were recruited in the days of the Yellow Book and the Rhymers' Club, among intelligent and well-informed young men and women at the older universities, who were prepared to adopt literature as a vocation. Such people develop very easily into pedants, and pedantry can be reared on a diet of contemporary literature as well as on perfectly safe classics. The minority who in any age are really responsive to new developments in literature and the arts should always include a proportion of people who are not themselves engaged in the practice of literature, who care for art because it helps them to make sense of their lives'.

Mr. Every doesn't actually bring out the word 'highbrow', but his tactic amounts to nothing more and nothing less than the launching of that appeal to the natural man and the natural man's dislike of the suggestion that perhaps in more important matters than football, billiards, and golf there are qualifications that can only be gained by discipline and experience, developing natural aptitude. For what can be meant by 'the minority should always include a proportion of people who are not themselves engaged in the practice of literature'? The minority is what it is; that it should be bigger is always desirable; but it will not be enlarged by pretending that confidence based on lack of cultivated literary experience and lack of trained aptitude in analysis and judgment —for what does 'not engaged in the practice of literature' mean?— can be counted on to distinguish and respond to the significantly new in literature.

Mr. Every's intention and drift are unmistakable. He writes:

> 'The border between literary criticism and the evaluation of a writer's ideas had been obscured by the critics of the twenties, and especially by Dr. Leavis, in the interests of "significant form". Now to his great distress criticism seemed to be becoming completely immersed in theological and sociological polemic'.

The doctrine of 'significant form' maintains that, where visual art is in question, value-judgments, or judgments of significance, that appeal to the values and interests of general living, are irrelevant; the experience of art is *sui generis* and unrelated to the rest of life, being the concern of an aesthetic sense that is insulated from the rest of one's organization. The true aesthetic appreciator can only ejaculate, since the 'significance' of 'significant form' is to be ineffable; signifying nothing that can be discussed or indicated, it just *is*. Mr. Every imputes a literary transposition of that doctrine to me. That is his way (and does he, on reflection, find it honest?) of dealing with my insistence that theological, sociological, political, or moral commentaries and judgments on works of literature should

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be relevant, and that the business of ensuring relevance is a delicate one, calling for literary experience, cultivated scruple, trained skill, and the literary critic's concern with the quality of the life that is concretely present in the work in front of him.

Having thus absolved himself from the duty of making the essential discriminations, Mr. Every can facilitate the business of pushing his own special line of goods by accepting with a large and reassuring catholicity, as established values, most of the current names. Auden, Dylan Thomas, David Gascoyne, Alex Comfort, Herbert Read, Ronald Duncan, Edith Sitwell, a whole team of Christian poets, and not only Sidney Keyes, the boy war-casualty whom by some caprice it has been agreed to immortalize as a symbol of lost Genius (I can see no ground for his reputation), but his friend John Heath-Stubbs: in all these, and how many more, one gathers, one can study, in the same sense as one can in D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot, the 'sensitive spot where a new response to life is taking shape'.

Mr. Every's own line of goods is of course Christian. Dr. Sitwell writes emotionally, with characteristic afflatus, about Christ; therefore she can be acclaimed as a great (if not yet quite a Christian) poet, of major significance in terms of the critic's concern with the 'sensitive spot'. Of his own discovery and fostering Mr. Every offers us, as poet and intellectual of established standing (we are to assume), Mr. Norman Nicholson—a writer in whom, I am bound to say, I can see no vestige of any gift, but only intentions and pretensions that have gathered assurance from assiduous encouragement and from the sense of swimming, shoal-supported, with the tide. But then, I can see no reason for being interested in Charles Williams, whom we are offered as a major power, and Mr. Nicholson's inspirer.

Mr. Every gives us a whole chapter on 'The Poetic Influence of Charles Williams':

> 'To-day critics are failing in their understanding of the younger poets because they are not aware of his later work'.

Williams, Mr. Every, without producing any argument or evidence tending to make the valuation in the least plausible, confidently sets up as a great poet—a peer, at least, of Eliot. In what sense this is Christian Discrimination comes out with almost disarming naïveté here:

> 'Admiring Milton, he rejected Eliot, until the arch-classicist and ultra-modern was revealed as an Anglo-Catholic lay theologian. In 1935-6 Eliot and he wrote plays in succession to one another for the same Canterbury festival, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Thomas Cranmer*. From that time on their mutual influence grew. In the long run Williams influenced Eliot more, because his own "effortless originality" was less open to any influence than Eliot's negative capacity, his infinite receptiveness'.

The passages of Williams' verse quoted by Mr. Every serve only to convince one that, however sound the poet's orthodoxy, he hadn't begun to be a poet, and that the critic is mistaken in

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supposing himself to be interested in poetry. But Mr. Every can assure us, as one who knows (having it on the highest authority) that it was Williams' creative influence that changed Mr. Eliot's attitude towards Milton:

> 'The influence of Eliot is seen in repulsions as well as in attraction. In answer to the challenge thrown down by his attack on the Chinese wall, Milton's grand manner of verse, Charles Williams built a Chinese wall of his own to resist the decay of words. This wall in the end prevailed to modify Eliot's judgment where critical arguments failed. In one instance at least the imitation of Milton had been of use'.

It is one of the most revealing of contemporary fashions to suppose that Mr. Eliot has seriously and radically changed his mind about Milton, and that the utterances giving colour to this view have significant critical bearings on his poetic development. I can only repeat that those who subscribe to this fashion can, it seems plain to me, never have taken an intelligent interest in his poetry, and never had any but a conventional respect for his genius. Mr. Eliot, it is true, has referred in a commendatory way to Charles Williams' introduction to the 'Worlds' Classics' Milton. Having taken the tip and looked at it I am obliged to report that I found it the merest attitudinizing and gesturing of a man who had nothing critically relevant to say. It may be an example of Christian Discrimination; I am sure it is not good literary criticism. As for Charles Williams' influence, all that we learn and divine of it leads me to the conclusion that here, in the *milieu* to which he belonged, we have a subject worth attention from the inquirer into the 'sociology' of contemporary literature. It seems to me that there is some danger of his verse-constructions being imposed on the student in succession to *The Testament of Beauty*.

What I want to say very earnestly to Bro. George Every is that, insofar as he is truly concerned for religion, I think he is doing his cause a great deal of harm. Charles Williams is ostensibly inspired by Christian doctrine. But if you approach as a literary critic, unstiffened by the determination to 'discriminate Christianly', or if you approach merely with ordinary sensitiveness and good sense, you can hardly fail to see that Williams' preoccupation with the 'horror of evil' is evidence of an arrest at the school-boy (and -girl) stage rather than of spiritual maturity, and that his dealings in 'myth', mystery, the occult, and the supernatural belong essentially to the ethos of the thriller. To pass off his writings as spiritually edifying is to promote the opposite of spiritual health.

More generally, to debase the currency, and abrogate the function of criticism, as Mr. Every offers to do, can only, I am convinced, do harm by the standards of any real concern for religion. What, one may ask, does Mr. Every offer his disciples in return for the great poet to whom he denies them access? He offers them (they were in the first place extension-lecturees, theological students, and training teachers) pretentious phrases, vague and muddled ideas,

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a confused exaltation of self-importance, and help towards believing that to feel vaguely excited and impressed is to have grappled with serious problems. On the other hand, to take, in any measure, what Mr. Eliot's poetry has to give is to be educated into a new understanding of the nature of precision in thought, and at the same time to experience intimately an emotional and spiritual discipline. And this holds, irrespective of whether or not the reader subscribes to Christian doctrine.

As for Christian Discrimination, it needs to be said that there can be no substitute for the scrupulous and disinterested approach of the literary critic. If Christian belief and Christian attitudes have really affected the critic's sensibility, then they will play their due part in his perceptions and judgments, without his summoning his creeds and doctrines to the job of discriminating and pronouncing. If, on the other hand, he does, like Bro. George Every, make a deliberate and determined set at 'discriminating Christianly', then the life of the spirit will suffer damage, more or less severe, in the ways that Bro. George Every's work merely exemplifies with a peculiarly rich obviousness. It is fair to add (if I may use a phrase that was once reported to me as having been applied by the Editor of *The Criterion* to something quite different) that he represents the most active and formidable of contemporary 'gang-movements'.

F. R. LEAVIS.

ART: THE RELIGION AND THE SAINT

RECOLLECTIONS OF LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH, by Robert Gathorne-Hardy (Constable, 18/-).

L. P. Smith is likely to be of interest to the future literary sociologist as having been a member of an influential 'set'. Mr. Gathorne-Hardy reports that 'Bernard Berenson, his brother-in-law, once said over-modestly to Logan, or so the latter affirmed, "If either of us is remembered after we're dead, it will only be because we knew Santayana" '. *Recollections* contains a letter to the author written from the Berensons' home near Florence: 'I find it very pleasant here, in the luxury and splendour of this great Italian villa. Mrs. Wharton is here, and Santayana nearby;—we are a little group of not unsuccessful people, old and ill and gay and disenchanted; and our tongues wag as freely I think as any tongues in Europe'. Looking back over the years, Smith could claim with justice to have been 'more or less acquainted' with Whistler, Sargent, and Henry James. And if he cared he could no doubt have collected similar but warmer testimonials than this, from Santayana, 'I have much to thank the Smiths for. They formed a lively band in the carnival, and led me into other bands in the masquerade, which I should hardly have joned of my own initiative'.[2]

[2] *The Middle Span*, by George Santayana.

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Recollections sharpens one's consciousness of certain characteristics common to the 'set' and underlines the criticism of their social and cultural aspirations that they were individually and as a group both too 'worldly' and too 'aesthetic'. Henry Adams and Henry James, Edith Wharton and Santayana certainly transcend the limitations of the *milieu* to which they belonged. Their writings are products of a finer civilization than anything (to judge, for instance, by *Portrait of Edith Wharton*[3]) realised in the day-to-day life of the group, of which Smith's works are more nearly a reflection. It is distinctive of these figures to have been able to conduct their lives according to a conception of what the civilized life should be. And yet it is surely not being hypercritical to find something unsatisfactory about this, for instance, of Edith Wharton's life in Paris:

> 'Here then she lived at last in plenty. She had all the company about her that she needed, and of all the kinds; and so long as her company was right of its kind she was not exclusive, and there was a great deal of variety to be seen in her charming rooms. Only this was always certain, that nothing admitted to the mixture would appear out of place against the background of her creation; the careless or the formless were no more to be found there than the rough and the rude. It was ever a polite gathering; but all were there who could interest Edith Wharton, and the ways of interesting her were many and diverse. Between the worldly and the literary lay her range, touching no far extreme in either direction; and within these limits, talent not too unworldly, elegance not too illiterate, there was space for a large concourse, and it was admirably filled'.

Mr. Lubbock himself, though playfully, brings the charge: 'It [the integrity of youth] may ask how a woman of such exacting judgment can be content with company in which art is an amusement, not a life to be lived. Didn't she realize that the true makers of art and shapers of thought were to be found elsewhere . . . Must we conclude that she won't go where thought is rich but entertainment modest? Dare one suppose that she has been a little spoilt by the world, and that the ranks of the toilers aren't fine enough for her?'[4]

The Cult of Perfection, as the loftier side of their aspirations may be termed, took several forms. The formula 'Flaubert-cum-Pater'[5] represents no more than the most general aspect of a standard which had to maintain itself over an abyss, an absence of related and supporting obligations—all that was missing from their lives as a result of the wrench from home, country, office. That

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[3]By Percy Lubbock.

[4]*Cf. The Great Tradition*, p. 172 (footnote), 'H. J.'s interest in "civilization" betrays, tested by his actual selectiveness in the concrete field before him, a grave deficiency. "He didn't know the right people", "Q" once said to me, discussing James's criticism of the country-house'.

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it was a serious and respectable standard, however debased by isolation, goes without saying. It takes, for instance, a curious form in Berenson. Many pages of his *Sketch* are devoted to an exposition of his sense that with all the success he had earned as an art critic, his life was a failure. And he goes on to list among his supporting reasons that the 'feeling, that one must strive for the enduring, this promotion of the permanent, the surviving, the eternal, to aesthetic and even moral value has tended to inhibit and even to disperse my energies . . . Unless I could acquire the illusion that I had something to offer that would be lasting, it seemed only decent to do nothing'. Behind this lament is the regret that he lacked a 'style', and, as he finely realized, that the cosmopolitan life is inimical to good writing.

'Style', however, for Berenson, it is significant to note, was exhibited by *The Brook Kerith* and *Héloïse and Abélard*. 'I had to realize that the pen is mightier than the thought, the learning, the feeling, the understanding; and that the muse of muses, Style, had chosen this up-to-date stage Irishman for its mouthpiece'. This notion of 'style' divorced from intelligent ideas was, of course, one from which Henry James was not exempt. In a letter to Edmund Gosse[6] James singles out the following passage from Loti's *Matelot*:

> 'Donc, ils en venaient à s'aimer d'une également pure tendresse, tous les deux. Elle, ignorante des choses d'amour et lisant chaque soir sa bible; elle, destinée à rester inutilement fraîche et jeune encore pendant quelques printemps pâles comme celui-ci, puis à vieillir et se faner dans l'enserrement monotone de ces mêmes rues et de ces mêmes murs. Lui, gâté déjà par les baisers et les étreintes, ayant le monde pour habitation changeante, appelé à partir, peut-être demain, pour ne revenir jamais et laisser son corps aux mers lointaines ... '

and notes: 'I have read *Matelot* more or less over again; for the extreme penury of the *idea* in Loti, and the almost puerile thinness of this particular donnée, wean me not a jot from the irresistible charm the rascal's very limitations have for me. I drink him down as he *is*—like a philtre or a *baiser*, and the coloration of his

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[5]The *T.L.S.* reviewer of Bernard Berenson's *Sketch for a Self Portrait* justly remarks: 'In spite of a laugh, in one of his books, at Pater's contemplation of the Mona Lisa, it is interesting to see how great a debt he acknowledges to Pater . . . He writes: "The genius who revealed to me what from childhood I had been instinctively tending towards—was Walter Pater in his *Marius*, his *Imaginary Portraits*, his *Child in the House*, his *Emerald Uthwart*, his *Demeter*. It is for that I have loved him since youth and shall be grateful to him even to the House of Hades where, in the words of Nausicaa to Odysseus, I shall hail him as god" '.

[6]May 1st, 1893, and compare in the *Notebooks* the entry for April 8th of that year.

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moindres mots has a peculiar magic for me. Read *aloud* to yourself the passage . . . and perhaps you will find in it something of the same strange *eloquence* of suggestion and rhythm as I do: which is what literature gives when it is most exquisite and which constitutes its sovereign value and its resistance to devouring time'.

Forty years later, Mr. Desmond MacCarthy wrote of the book on which Smith's admirers think that his reputation will rest, 'I agree with those reviewers of *All Trivia* who have predicted for it a life beyond the grave of contemporary reputation. It is the sort of bibelot that Father Time often keeps on his mantelpiece when he changes the furniture in his house. For style is the best preservative of thought, when we mean by style a manner of writing both traditional and personal, and excellently adapted to the matter in hand'. (Though we may note that here there is 'thought' to be preserved, whereas James dismissed the Loti passage with 'And yet what niaiseries!') The quotation from Mr. MacCarthy is a reminder that L. P. Smith is not only a moon to the suns of the aristocratic American phase which gave us *The Education of Henry Adams, Winds of Doctrine, What Maisie Knew, The House of Mirth, Italian Painters of the Renaissance,* a phase which did not continue into the post-1918 world, but, owing to his extensive English connections (and in no small part to Mr. MacCarthy himself), a factor in the 'continuous literary tradition' of England, so that Mr. Connolly (who dedicated *Enemies of Promise*[7] to 'Logan')

[7]Which contains the remark, 'The last great exponents of the Mandarin style were Pater and Henry James'. Now that the book has been revised, we may note that this would-be stylist has detected (prompted, he says, by Edmund Wilson) slipshod phrases on every page of the original edition. The new edition nevertheless stands in need of further revision. More interesting, however, is the indication of a certain stagnation in the literary *milieu* where Mr. Connolly plays the part of intelligent weathercock. 'What is much more disturbing is that I should have found it necessary to make so few alterations . . . I have not altered or inserted a single opinion . . . I have found it quite unnecessary to modify any of my literary judgments. In other words I am unwilling to recognize any revolution in the reputation of modern authors over the last ten years. Yeats, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, alas, are dead. The Sitwells have grown enormously in stature, Aldous Huxley has made a brilliant recovery, Auden and Orwell added new triumphs —but with these modifications the literary values remain unaltered' Damaging as the admission may be for the author, the reader cannot but be grateful that *Enemies of Promise* has been made available again almost unchanged. We are not likely to have a second document of this order. The book was reviewed in these pages when it first appeared (see Vol. VIII, No. 1, 'The Background of Twentieth Century Letters', and for Mr. Connolly's prose and criticism, Vol. XIII, No. 3, 'From Playground to

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in 1943 was 'grabbing with avidity' Smith's latest story for *Horizon* and now a *Sunday* reviewer of *Recollections* can write, 'The author of *Trivia* and *On Reading Shakespeare* will be remembered long after many noisier reputations are buried in silence. It is impossible that he will be considered a great writer by future generations, but because it is probable that he will be considered the best writer of prose in his time, his fame rests on enduring foundations'.

This curious career deserves a moment's scrutiny. Smith demonstrated by publishing *Youth of Parnassus* in 1895 that he had reached the age of thirty without developing a scrap of talent. The reader of these 'Stories of Oxford Life' might be pardoned for supposing that their author had no first-hand knowledge of either Oxford or Life and little gift for constructing fables involving both. The flatness, limpness of the prose defy the search for models —it clearly isn't the product of intelligent study of any originals. Yet Smith was convinced that great prose could be written by practising hard and frequenting 'fine writers'. He apparently took Pater as his model and wrote exercises in the form of journals and letters. He claims (in *Unforgotten Years*) that Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en Prose* gave him his start. 'It occurred to me that the separate page or paragraph of prose had not been adequately exploited. Every aspect of existence I believed could find its best expression in some special literary form. But in the experience of each of us were there not moods, brief impressions and modern ways of feeling for which no exactly appropriate way of expression was at hand? This was the notion that began to haunt me in odd moments. Something like Baudelaire in style was what I dreamed of; but a style more idiomatic, more colloquial, yet capable of rising to the heights of poetic English prose'. The results of this meditation were first printed in 1897, polished and reprinted privately in 1902 as *Trivia* (*Poems in Prose*), and would in all likelihood have been forgotten had not Mr. MacCarthy encouraged the author to continue in 1918. An examination of *Trivia* in its final form suggests that Smith was progressively narrowing his interest, from the single paragraph to the phrase, and from the phrase to the 'jewel-tinted' word, until he could bring forward (how seriously he probably could not himself have said, his irony being of the lightning conductor variety, insulating author and reader from serious consequences):

Grave'). In the present context its peculiar interest lies in the perspective which enables Mr. Connolly to see the post-1918 authors as in the pre-war tradition. 'In the history of literature there can have been few books more talked and written about; few names more mentioned than those of Proust, Joyce, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, the Sitwells, and Paul Valéry. Their moment was propitious. After the post-war disillusion they offered a religion of beauty, a cult of words, of meanings understood only by the initiated at a time when people were craving such initiations'

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'PHRASES

'Is there, after all, any solace like the solace and consolation of Language? When I am disconcerted by the unpleasing aspects of existence, when to me, as to Hamlet, this earth seems a sterile promontory, it is not in Metaphysics nor in Religion that I seek for reassurance, but in fine phrases. The thought of gazing on life's Evening Star makes of ugly old age a pleasing prospect; if I call Death mighty and unpersuaded, it has no terrors; I am perfectly content to be cut down as a flower, to flee as a shadow, to be swallowed like a snowflake on the sea. These similes soothe and effectually console me. I am sad only at the thought that Words must perish like all things mortal; that the most perfect Metaphors must be forgotten when the human race is dust.

'"But the iniquity of Oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy"'.

The cultivation of this sort of interest in words was, however, not without consequences. It formed the backbone of his literary judgment—and not only in prose. He found, for instance, the greatness of Milton in 'a whole treasure-trove of jewel-tinted words—shells of sound, so full of overtones, and arousing such echoes after echoes of association that they have won him the enduring fame of the golden alchemist of our language'. Above all, it led him into the solidest community of feeling with 'fellow-craftsmen' in the England of our day. For Smith, Bridges was 'the finest craftsman who has handled English since the time of Milton'. 'Max and Binyon are our greatest contemporaries', he wrote in 1942! (A collection of tributes to 'Max' would show the astonishing lengths to which adulation of *belles-lettres* can be carried. The sky is the limit here, the only parallel being the associated cult of Jane Austen.) But the supreme example of the consequences of a narrow taste in misleading one into 'knowing the wrong people' and overlooking the genuine is quoted by Mr. Gathorne-Hardy in his *Recollections*:

'"If we could find a bookshop," said Logan, "there's one particular book I should like to buy you. There was a nineteenth-century poet whose name I can't remember now, though I know it perfectly well—damn it! what was his name? He wrote one book of sonnets, just one book which he polished for years, until he'd made it quite perfect. If I could choose what book in literature I might have written, I'd choose that. I'd rather have written it than any other book in the world!"

'Being profoundly ignorant then in French literature, I didn't realize, as now I should, that he was referring to *Les Trophées* of Heredia. Logan's copy is now in my possession; on the flyleaf he has written, "The book, of all the books in the world, that I should have wished to have written". This choice, I think, illustrates most admirably both the defects and the merits in Logan's heart: his boundless worship of beauty and

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perfection—and that curious decrepitudenizing fear of the heart's depths. In nineteenth-century France alone, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, surely, or some book of Verlaine's ought to be a preferable choice; but those revealed chasms, which Logan could never bring himself to explore; and then, how much pleasanter to have been Heredia than Verlaine, or Baudelaire!'

(This example has the further merit of pointing to the truly international nature of this respect for 'craftsmanship'. Smith's slightly younger contemporary, Gide, has recorded his memories of Heredia in *Si le grain ne meurt* ... : 'Il s'intéressait à peu près exclusivement au monde extérieur et à l'art ; je veux dire qu'il restait on ne peut plus embarrassé dans le domaine de la spéculation, et qu'il ne connaissait d'autrui que les gestes. Mais il avait beaucoup de lecture, et, comme il ignorait ses manques, rien ne lui faisait besoin. C'était plutôt un artiste qu'un poète ; et plutôt encore un artisan. Je fus terriblement déçu d'abord ; puis j'en vins à me demander si ma déception ne venait pas de ce que je me faisais de l'art et de la poésie une idée fausse et si la simple perfection de métier n'était pas chose de plus de prix que je n'avais cru jusqu'alors'.)

'Logan, in *Trivia*', says Mr. Gathorne-Hardy, 'painted a remarkably true picture of himself'. He did indeed supply the literary critic (if we include his carefully selected autobiographical sketches and *Reperusals*) with ample *data* for comment on the mind, the character, the *mores* and way of life of a certain type of *homme de lettres*. There would in fact be no need to turn for further evidence to *Recollections* if there had not been issued a challenge such as appeared in *The Sunday Times* in a review by Mr. Desmond MacCarthy entitled 'A Saint of the Life of Letters'. Since Mr. Gathorne-Hardy says something very similar, my attempt to use his evidence for justifying a very different account may appear disingenuous. In any case it is in place to enquire into the author's credibility as a witness. Although there is sufficient evidence in *Recollections* to show that Mr. Gathorne-Hardy is a genuine disciple[8] of L. P. Smith and has a proper regard for truth,

[8]The question of disciples was a crucial one for a group without obvious means of securing continuity. Mr. Berenson regretted that talk is not self-registering and confessed that he preferred to talk to women, 'especially certain society women', and to the adolescent-minded rather than the mature. Santayana decided that his kind should not mate, ('A *déraciné*, a man who has been torn up by the roots, cannot be replanted and should never propagate his kind'. 'I have been involuntarily uprooted. I accept the intellectual advantages of that position, with its social and moral disqualifications'.) and found his happiness in the society of well-connected young men of a non-academic turn of mind. 'The bond between them and me was of another kind. It was what I might call the sporting mind, unbiased intelligence, spreading freely from youthful curiosity to the interests of the world in general, including the

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it is pleasant to find Mr. MacCarthy confirming from his intimate knowledge of Smith both that the account given in *Recollections* is 'a most truthful one' and that Mr. Gathorne-Hardy was of Smith's disciples 'the closest, most faithful, most dependent'. Nevertheless there are certain cautionary remarks to be made. The use that may be made of *Recollections* is qualified by a deliberate bias in the author's presentation. 'I may have treated with too much irony—but that would have been Logan's way—the comical aspects of our mutual life.

This bias would not have been distorting if the author had succeeded in giving, in the convincing detail with which the faults and loathsome aspects are presented, full realization to his lively sense of L. P. Smith's more amiable qualities. Instead we have to rely on such remarks as these:

> 'Among the qualities of his character which had most impressed and bewitched me, was an unparalleled aesthetic sensibility. Words out-worn and over-worked must be reduced to their primitive meaning in order to express it. His enjoyment of any beauty—of countryside or picture or building or a concatenation of words—was like a Delphic inspiration. To enjoy such things with him was to be possessed by a sort of maenad enthusiasm'.

But when we come to details we find as an instance of Smith's literary sensibility, that after reading out Morris's *A Garden by the Sea*, the author looked up at Smith and saw that tears were running out of his eyes. Smith professed an extravagant love of flowers, and in particular of hepaticas; but Mr. Gathorne-Hardy tells a story showing that it was really the name and not the flower which charmed him. And after noting that Smith's literary appreciation was limited, he goes on to admit, 'In other arts, his taste was less finished' and furnishes convincing evidence covering music, drama, and painting. So when we hear, for instance, that 'he talked like an angel' or 'Logan could be the best company in the world', but are given telling instances of the reverse qualities, the boring anecdotes Smith endlessly repeated and behaviour that would have disgraced a hermit in whom the sense of social obligations had withered, it is difficult to feel sure where the balance should be struck.

Fortunately, on the central topic, Smith's claim to the title of a literary saint, the evidence strikes me as overwhelming. Smith was fond of referring to the agony of his literary labours, 'the delight and misery of his life'. It was therefore a happy thought

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adventures of the philosophers'. The note of *The Last Puritan* was struck by Smith when he told his disciple that beside the common interest in Jeremy Taylor another feature had attracted his favour: 'That time when I first saw you in the shop, I said to myself, "This is one of the finest flowers of English civilization, Eton and Christchurch" '.

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to record a typical day of this agony from first-hand participation. The quotation is lengthy, to give the reader full control.

'When I arrived he would sometimes be in bed writing, or else sitting close to the window, with that writing-table tray on a card table in front of him. If he was at the height of his euphoria, in later years, most of the morning would be taken up with uproarious accounts of his most recent practical joke; he would read me some extraordinary anonymous letter, or show me the all but equally extravagant responses of his friendly victims. One day, shortly before the war, he told me how he'd had a fantastic mock quarrel with a lady; as a climax, he got Hammond, the maid who by then attended on him, to buy a dead cat from the dustman and throw it into the lady's garden.

'At first I would try, as tactfully as I could, to get him down to the job in hand; but I soon learnt that these vapours must be allowed to escape of their own accord. At last, however, work would be started.

'He would produce a wad of writing paper, fixed together on a stick-pin, and start reading. My job was to make every criticism, however captious, which came into my head; to almost all he listened patiently, and if, for instance, I pointed out an ugly repetition of words or of sounds, he would probably say "Of course!" and correct it. Or I might suggest cutting out some words. "Quite right", he would usually answer; "look how it improves a sentence to shorten it!"

'Sometimes he was held up for the right word. If I could give it him out of my head, he would often say "That's worth a penny" (or threepence, or sixpence; I think the most I ever got was a shilling), and hand me the sum. But if my suggestions were unacceptable, the search began; Roget's *Thesaurus* was consulted; then that golden poetic dictionary of the seventeenth century, Poole's *Parnassus*, a glittering collection of gem-like epithets arranged alphabetically under appropriate nouns. If these failed he turned to his notebooks, where, carefully indexed, he had a huge collection of epithets collected during his enormous reading. "That's it!" he would say at last, lovingly, one might almost say lasciviously, murmuring over and over again the desired and delectable adjective.

'Sometimes, but rarely, he would pass over a suggestion with the faintest hint of pique, "This is only a rough draft", he would say, "I shall go over it again". But, in general—so serious and honest was his attitude to literature—he would consider any suggestion, as happily as a great naturalist might receive some otherwise unattainable information from an amateur.

'It was a curious situation—the master seeking and receiving advice from the apprentice. I suppose he used on the whole about half, or rather more, of my suggestions; but to leave that statement unqualified would seem to be claiming impertinently

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and over-proudly a large credit for his finished work. In fact, I can do nothing of the kind. He worked in prose very much as Gray worked in poetry; his writings are a mosaic of other men's phrases, so sought after, so chosen, and so disposed, that the resulting arrangement became an original composition, and the voice entirely his own. That I could help him was due to a capacity, partly my own already and partly acquired from him, for noticing and retaining the sort of words and epithets which he could use; also, as I assisted at his labours, I came to know the effect he would be trying for, and thus to notice when he was falling short of it'.

This is surely the Higher Quilting! And yet this is how the masters did it, Smith would explain. 'Our older writers were lovers of language; they were fine gentlemen, even dandies sometimes in their use of words; they read old books and studied dictionaries in their search for apt expressions . . .'.

Mr. Gathorne-Hardy insists that here and here only we find the complete man. Smith himself wrote that, 'when you are older you will realize that a beautiful phrase is the most important thing in the world—that nothing else really matters'. This, at least was no mere phrase. Smith subordinated everything to the cult of words. First of all to be sacrificed were his own deep feelings. Mr. Gathorne-Hardy thinks that Smith had such feelings but dared not express them. 'Numberless are the similes of Man's life. May I liken it now to a raft, floating upon unplumbed, yet transpicuous deeps? Some men spend their lives on the edge of the raft, gazing down into those infinite waters. Logan sat plumb in the middle, intent on his letter game, and facing no more of that unfathomable ocean than the occasional flurries of surf that sometimes flashed inevitably across his vision, and these he didn't like. To gaze out upon the breadth, or to search probingly into the profundities of that ocean, was to him an unspeakable horror'. He was content to take his principles of life from others and uncritically. 'He shrunk, shudderingly, from the fullness of life, and didn't care to question overmuch convenient, carelessly accepted, and comfortable assertions'. Other people were correspondingly opaque. 'The inner feelings of other people were for him a dead world'. 'On the whole Logan didn't like people; he only really liked those who spoke his own language and acknowledged his own system of values; people among whom his wisdom was esteemed and his wit comprehended'. He remained throughout his long life a spoilt child, expecting the universe to arrange itself for Smith's comfort, in great and small things alike.[9]

[9] 'The three women in his household, Mrs. Russell, his sister, Mary, the cook, and Hammond, sacrificed themselves continually to him. If eggs came to the house, he had them all. Admirers from overseas sent him a steady succession of food parcels. Only leavings went to the others. He took these things as a right'.

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One of Smith's aphorisms runs: 'People say that life is the thing, but I prefer reading'. *Recollections* brings home to us that it wasn't a matter for choice—reading was a daily necessity. When he was more than usually incapable of conducting his life, he withdrew from human contact and took to reading as to a drug. On one such occasion, 'he read straight ahead through a large part of the Dictionary of National Biography'. Being apparently incapable of living in the real world, Smith seems to have spent most of his non-working hours in make-believe, playing not always pleasant jokes on other people. He enjoyed the pleasures of *Schadenfreude* to an immoderate extent.[10] Childish, too, it seems, was his minor cult of obscenity, which took on a pathetic note as his mind decayed. Towards the end, 'I want', he said dreamily, 'to be old and gay and obscene'. Mr. Gathorne-Hardy writes: 'He had neither the robust bawdiness of the public school or the public house, nor quite the unhealthy, evasive, dirty mind of the sex-starved. (I cannot assert with authority that Logan died a virgin—though the fact, if proved, would not surprise me. But he did not seem to me dangerously repressed—I was never afraid that he'd get himself into trouble in the park.) No—apart from the classical and familiar sort of impropriety that none but the mealy-mouthed eschew—Logan's naughty stories frequently took the form of enormous, and, I am sure, quite unreal, fantasies about the private life of actual people'.

The list of childish traits to be found illustrated in *Recollections* is long: the collecting of old books merely to raise envy in friends who coveted without being able to procure copies; boasting in company; the naïve admiration of fashionable or titled people. L. P. Smith was evidently so very much less distinguished a person than the eminent members of the 'set' to which he can claim to have belonged that his interest for the sociologist is limited: he is an extreme case: what is overt and central in his predicament appears fitfully and as it were on the underside of the greater figures. But it appears there nevertheless, this unhealthy streak, and the signs of it would no doubt be more abundant if we had similarly outspoken 'Recollections', by qualified observers, of the lives of James, Edith Wharton, Santayana, Adams, and Berenson.[11]

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[10]E. Marsh in *A Number of People* cites a mild example (in a letter from Smith): 'I was inordinately solaced to find that you had detected a misprint of Chapman's own. We are all human, and those of us whose pasts are spotted and pimpled with misprints delight in derelictions of this kind in the supposedly impeccable. But you point out his slip with great kindness, and I do not think that it is on this account that he has taken to his bed'.

[11]Except, perhaps, as providing further illustration of the theme of these remarks, Janet Adam Smith's *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson* must be dismissed as a piece of unrequired book-making. It is an attempt to treat the two figures as of the same order of merit—and there is, it must be admitted, excuse enough

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Mr. Gathorne-Hardy was obliged by his sense of loyalty to the facts to devote the greater part of his book to the ugly breakdown which ended in insanity. Before taking leave of L. P. Smith, I should like to recall that he is the author of *Words and Idioms*, a book that for many years to come will prove useful to students interested in a use of words quite different from that exhibited in

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on James's side. In all his writings on Stevenson, James never came near 'placing' his friend. There is no echo of Stevenson's own self-criticism: 'My skill deserts me, such as it is, or was. It was a very little dose of inspiration, and a pretty little trick of style, long lost, improved by the most heroic industry . . . I cannot take myself seriously, as an artist, the limitations are so obvious'. Instead James's pen provided, as each work of Stevenson's appeared, material for the most extravagant 'blurbs'. 'For the said *Catriona* so reeks and hums with genius that there is no refuge for the desperate reader but in straightforward prostration . . . If it hadn't been for *Catriona* we couldn't this year [1893] have held up our head. It had been long, before that, since any decent sentence was turned in English'. James makes it clear that for him Stevenson 'before all things . . . is a writer with a style' and he evidently also appreciated him as a rare critic of style: 'I can't (spiritually) afford *not* to put the book under the eye of the sole and single Anglo-Saxon capable of perceiving—though he may care for little else in it—how well it is written'. (Stevenson countered with extravagant praise for *Roderick Hudson* but confessed, 'I can't bear *The Portrait of a Lady*', and in 1892 wrote, 'I am now reduced [for reading] to two of my contemporaries, you and Barrie'.) But it was after Stevenson's death that James expounded the grounds for his effusive 'I love so your divine prose'. In a long review of *Letters to His Family and Friends*, published in 1900 and reprinted in *Notes on Novelists*, James singled out for praise 'a passage so richly charged with imagination as that in which the young lover recalls her as he has first seen and desired her, seated at grey of evening on an old tomb in the moorland, and unconsciously making him think, by her scrap of song, both of his mother, who sang it and whom he has lost, and

> "of their common ancestors now dead, of their rude wars composed, their weapons buried with them, and of these strange changelings, their descendants, who lingered a little in their places and would soon be gone also, and perhaps sung of by others at the gloaming hour. By one of the unconscious arts of tenderness the two women were enshrined together in his memory. Tears, in that hour of sensibility, came into his eyes indifferently at the thought of either; and the girl, from being something merely bright and shapely, was caught up into the zone of things serious as life and death and his dead mother. So that, in all ways and on either side, Fate played his game artfully with this

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Trivia, and that for the part he played in bringing to light the Burley MS. (which was destroyed by fire soon after he found it) the name of Smith will be remembered with gratitude as long as Donne has scholarly readers.

H. A. MASON.

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poor pair of children. The generations were prepared, the pangs were made ready, before the curtain rose on the dark drama".

'It is not a tribute that Stevenson would have appreciated, but I may not forbear noting how closely such a page recalls many another in the tenderest manner of Pierre Loti. There would not, compared, be a pin to choose between them'.

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